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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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M.A

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade

1983

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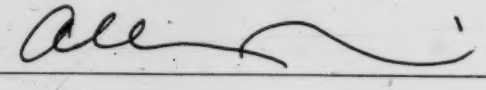

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# "Religion in Bulgakov's The White Guard and The Master and Margarita"

by

Allan Patrick Reid

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

IN

Russian Literature

Department of Slavic and East European Studies

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Fall, 1983

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study treats the role and importance of religion in The White Guard and The Master and Margarita. Bulgakov's works have not been sufficiently examined from this perspective, one that is especially important to an understanding of The White Guard and The Master and Margarita. To begin with we find that religion figures significantly in Bulgakov's biography. If we turn to his use of sources we find that he used many and varied sources, including religious ones, but not consistently. The most important literary source is Goethe's *Faust*, and the Faust legend in general, although Bulgakov, as with scriptural and religious sources, is highly original in his incorporation of the Faustian tradition. Questions involving the Apocalypse and eschatology are important in the two novels being considered, and in several other works by Bulgakov also. The fact that many of the religious themes and concerns found in The White Guard and The Master and Margarita can also be found in other works suggests that religion was an abiding concern for Bulgakov. Exemplary of other works which demonstrate this point are Adam and Eve and Flight. In particular, they exhibit his employment of the figural technique and his use of dreams to go beyond spatial and temporal restrictions.

Bulgakov's first novel, The White Guard, is dominated by a dichotomous perspective which opposes especially the material and the spiritual and the transient and eternal in

our ways of viewing the world. This is applied to the events of 1918 and to history in general. Ultimately, Bulgakov arrives at the question of the nature of and the place of Apocalypse in man's existence, and how it relates to the specific events in question. Religion and religious thinking play a key role in this work and, in particular, we can discern therein a deistic tendency which affirms the existence of God and of personal immortality.

Similarly, The Master and Margarita reflects a clearly deist viewpoint and affirms personal immortality. The question of the existence of God and of the devil dominate the book on the conceptual level, and are accompanied by a presentation of the problems of good and evil and eschatological reflections. Particularly striking is Bulgakov's attempt to render the notion of evil non-absolute.

Finally, there are several techniques and concepts which Bulgakov employs in these two novels which are especially important for the discussion of religion. These include the intertwining of dream and reality to suspend temporal and spatial restrictions, the use of the figural technique to establish a vertical connection in terms of meaning and the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which apears as Bulgakov's response to difficulties posed by the problems of good and evil and freedom.

Only once the presence and significance of religious motifs and problems has been established and explored do

these two novels begin to "cohere."

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## I. INTRODUCTION

"The hope of eternity and the yearning for life is the oldest, as it is the greatest, of human desires."[1] The hope of eternity and a great yearning for life both on earth and beyond are frequently reflected in Bulgakov's work. These concerns inform his religious views which have a key function in many of his works. Most notable of these are The White Guard (*Belaia gvardiia*, 1924)[2] and The Master and Margarita, (*Master i Margarita*, 1940).[3] The role and importance of religion in these two works form the subject of the present study.

The undisguised presence of religious motifs, problems, themes and other related elements in much of Bulgakov's work has not gone unnoticed, but neither has it received the critical attention one could reasonably expect given their proliferation and arguably crucial importance. To the best of my knowledge only one commentator states non-ambiguously that Bulgakov's work has a significant religious dimension,[4]

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[1] "Plutarch, quoted by A.S. Pringle-Pattison, "Eternal Life," (in) Philosophy of Religion: A Book of Readings, (London: The MacMillan Company, 1968), p. 527.

[2] Bulgakov, M., Belaia gvardiia, (in) *Romany*, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1973).

[3] M. Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita* , (in) *Romany*, (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1973).

[4] A.C. Wright, Mikhail Bulgakov: Life and Interpretation, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), e.g. p. 75, and A.C. Wright, "Mikhail Bulgakov's Developing World View," Canadian-American Slavic Studies, XV (Summer-Fall, 1981), p. 152. Peter Petro also states clearly that there is a religious dimension (pp. 58-59) but his concern is purely with the role of religion vis a vis satire. "Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Master: Metaphysical Satire", (in) Modern Satire: Four Studies, (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam:

But even he does not buttress his observations with the necessary analyses. Bulgakov's insights into and treatment of several key religious problems are interesting and worthy of study for themselves and, above all, for their functions in relevant works and in his overall corpus.

The present work will be divided according to the following plan. In this first chapter I will be concerned with establishing the context in which these questions must be viewed and understood, i.e. with biographical information, questions of literary traditions, movements and antecedents, the role of sources, and the relevance of other works by Bulgakov to the function of religion in The White Guard and The Master and Margarita. In Chapters II and III I will take up the specifically religious characteristics of these two novels respectively by analyzing the texts to determine more precisely what demonstrably touches upon questions which are primarily religious in nature, and then I will analyze Bulgakov's treatment of these questions in relation to the texts. In Chapter IV I will proceed synthetically, by demonstrating what the specific features of Bulgakov's religious views are, with special emphasis on his treatment of various aspects of the problems of good and evil, and eschatology. I will relate this to significant trends in the history of Western thought and to Bulgakov's work considered both as a whole and from the perspective of the two novels under focus here.

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4(cont'd)Mouton Publishers, 1982).

I would like to begin with Bulgakov the man. Upon examination of his biography one immediately realizes that it is not at all surprising that religion appears in so many of his works. Bulgakov was brought up in a decidedly religious environment. His father was a professor of Divinity at the Kiev Theological Academy,[5] and not only were his children brought up in the spirit of Christianity, but it appears they, and especialy Mikhail, also pursued and enjoyed discussion of theoretical aspects of spiritual matters.[6] In addition, the reknowned philosopher and theologian Sergei Bulgakov was the author's second cousin.[7] There is no evidence that the two ever met, but it seems safe to assume that at the very least they were aware of each other's existence. The fact that the Bulgakov's produced two theologians within a single generation - one of international stature, and the other, if one can judge by his range of erudition and scholarly interests,[8] not an unimportant figure at a more regional level - suggests much about the atmosphere in which Mikhail Afanas'ievich grew up.[9]

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[5] Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 3.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid. For information on S. Bulgakov see N. Berdiaev, et.al, Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia, Eds. B. Shagrin, A. Todd, (New York: Harz Howard, 1977), "Introduction I" and "Introduction II," pp. V-LV, and pp. 186-7, and N.O. Lossky, History of Russian Philosophy, (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1951), pp. 192-232.

[8] L. Milne, *The Master and Margarita*: A Comedy of Victory, (Birmingham: Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1977), p. 36, f.n. 12 lists his areas of scholarly interest.

[9] In fact this may be understated. According to D. Treadgold,

If we expand our purview and take into consideration the great religious questioning and controversy which characterized this period,'° it is clearly within reason to suggest that religion and religious questions were never far away. Although it might be amiss to imply that these were the dominant or pivotal forces in his early life, one can justifiably argue that they were, in fact, important. Still, I do not wish to suggest that Bulgakov was a candidate for the cloister. There is no trace of the ascetic or fanatic in what has been reconstructed of his biography.

Although his biographers make only scanty reference to what role religion may have played in Bulgakov's life, there are isolated remarks which can be considered significant.'' The fact that there are so few references does not preclude the possibility that religion did play a proportionally large role. What information there is suggests that its role was significant, but the biographers, like the critics, seem disinclined to even aproach the question. In addition, of course, there appears to be a lack of the kind of primary sources which could shed light on the matter. As indicated

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'(cont'd)(Sergei) "Bulgakov's ancestors had been priests for six generations,..." The West in Russia and China: Religious and Secular Thought in Modern Times, Vol. I, Russia, 1472-1917, (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 221.

'°For this see B.G. Rosenthal, Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), Treadgold, Vol. I, pp. 216-42, and J. Billington, The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture,. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 473-518.

'' E.g. Wright, Life and Interpretations,p. 170, says explicitly that religion was important for him but does not elaborate. See also pp. 3, 253.

above, religious motifs can be traced throughout his writing career, and this allows one to infer that he never ceased to be influenced by religious concerns. Moreover, though it may be due more to the way in which the biographer has construed events than to the real meaning of things, I think it is possible to attach special significance to the immediate reaction of Bulgakov's third wife when he died. "...in a fit of violent anger against God who had allowed it,..." she systematically destroyed all the icons in their apartment.'[12] The mere presence of icons in their apartment in 1940 implies much, since, for obvious reasons, religious beliefs and practices were not openly displayed during that part of the Stalin era. However, the fact that she chose icons and not paintings, flower-pots, books or whatever, suggests even more. Surely, at least on the unconscious level, her act could have reflected her understanding of, or belief in, an etiological, albeit symbolical, relationship between the icons and what had just transpired. We cannot know how deep her own religious beliefs were at this time,'[13] and in any case we are not at liberty to transfer our judgements about her actions to her husband's views. However, one would have to be overly pedantic to deny that her actions do seem meaningful for our context.'[14]

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'[12]Ibid., p. 253.

'[13]Wright says that at the beginning of their relationship she considered religion to be "unfashionable". Ibid., p. 170.

'[14] This story has obvious parallels with the story of Kierkegaard's father cursing God for his cruelty. D. Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1942), pp. 71-2.

If we turn from biography to the question of Bulgakov's sources, we see that it is indeed a very complex one, and much ink has been spent on it.'[15] It is clear that Bulgakov read widely and to advantage. His superb descriptions of Moscow and Kiev barely outstrip those of Pilate's Jerusalem or Molière's Paris, although he had never seen even the contemporary versions of the latter two cities.'[16] Accuracy of historical and architectural detail are matched by depth of familiarity with critical and literary sources of great range.'[17] For present purposes, this concerns mainly the Jerusalem sections of The Master and Margarita, because Bulgakov was, of course, describing contemporary reality in The White Guard and the Moscow sections of The Master and Margarita. Most studies which have examined the question of sources have been largely unsatisfactory.'[18] It is one thing to catalogue historical, literary or critical sources used

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[15] C.f. G. Elbaum, *Analiz iudeiskikh glav Mastera i Margarity M. Bulgakova*, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), Wright, Life and Interpretations, e.g. p. 177ff., 258ff., D.B. Pruitt, "St. John and Bulgakov: The Model of a Parody of Christ," Canadian-American Slavic Studies XV 2-3 (Summer-Fall, 1981), pp. 312-20, M. Iovanovich, "*Evangelie ot Matveia* kak literaturnyi istochnik *Mastera i Margarity*," Canadian-American Slavic Studies, XV 2-3 (Summer-Fall, 1981), pp. 295-311, and B.A. Beattie and P.W. Powell, "Bulgakov, Dante and Relativity," Canadian-American Slavic Studies, XV 2-3, (Summer-Fall, 1981), pp. 250-69.

[16] In reference to Molière's Paris I am relying on Wright's analysis and conclusions concerning the relevant works, i.e. Life of Monsieur de Molière (*Zhizn' gospodina de Mol'era, 1933*) and Molière or A Cabal of Hypocrites, (*Kabala sviatosh*, 1930), Wright, Life and Interpretations, pp. 177ff.

[17] Elbaum, Analiz, offers the most extensive discussion of these.

[18] Compare: "When Elbaum turns from tracing sources to interpretation, however, he runs into rather more difficulty." E. Haber, review of Elbaum, *Analiz*, in Slavic and East European Journal, XXVI 4, (1982), pp. 489-90.

in a work such as The Master and Margarita, or to indicate that such and such a character or detail suggests that the author was familiar with a certain source, etc., but it is entirely something else to proceed to develop an interpretation of the novel based primarily on such a contention, which, to a greater or lesser extent, is what many commentators or critics have done. The resultant misinterpretations arise most often out of a single methodological error, namely, focussing on parts of various dimensions to form a view of the whole. When dealing with the question of the role of sources it is necessary to proceed very cautiously, and this is painfully obvious in the case of Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita.

Errors take many forms. For example, M. Glenny begins with the fact that Bulgakov and Shestov were contemporaries in Kiev, and arrives at major assumptions whereby he says they must have known each other. He then goes on to establish very general textual parallels between the two authors and asserts the presence of Shestovian existentialist elements in The Master and Margarita.[19] He does all this despite the lack of evidence that the two ever met and our knowing that Bulgakov did not read Shestov.[20] L. Tikos picks up on Woland's calling himself an expert on H. Aurillac and, having pinpointed likely sources, adduces a parallel between Stalin and Woland, claiming that Woland

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[19] M. Glenny, "Existential Thought in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*", Canadian-American Slavic Studies, XV 2-3 (Summer-Fall, 1981), pp. 238-49.
[20] Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 171.

must be understood to be, if not Stalin, then, at least, his consultant.[21] That this verges on the ludicrous both methodologically and analytically should be obvious. Regardless of who Aurillac was, Woland has absolutely nothing in common with Stalin, as I will show in greater detail below.

Claims have been made separately for at least two of the Gospels as Bulgakov's definitive source for appropriate sections,[22] in addition to other contemporary and historical sources. In each case the critic has some sort of insight or has discerned a textual correspondence, but instead of limiting himself to what can be arguably inferred, he goes on to interpret all or much of the novel on the basis of some such small detail. The conclusions of such studies usually contain something of genuine interest, but since they inevitably contradict one another,[23] they are of very limited worth. What can be deduced from these and other such studies is that Bulgakov used many sources, but he did so inconsistently from the point of view of establishing meanings . He borrowed freely from here and there, not in order to encode some sort of secret gnostic message,[24]

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[21] L. Tikos, "Some Notes on the Significance of Gerbert Aurillac in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*," Canadian-American Slavic Studies, XV 2-3 (Summer-Fall, 1981) pp. 321-9.

[22] Iovanovich, "Evangelie," Pruitt, "St. John and Bulgakov," and Beattie and Powell, "Relativity," p. 259, (for Matthew).

[23] A comparison of Iovanovich's and Pruitt's articles provides the most obvious examples of this.

[24] Despite the fact that for Bulgakov "simplicity...was the hallmark of good writing," (Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 171,) the majority of critics insist that The Master and Margarita contains some sort of secret

but to impart a feeling of authenticity to the picture he draws, and to render artistically probable the themes and problems he is treating.

Besides biblical-historical sources, the other singularly important source must be Goethe's *Faust*.[25] Many have sought to discern who in the novel is the Faust character.[24] This assumes that the novel is a Faust-novel and/or that some one or more of the characters is based on the Faust legend. One can grant certain textual similarities, but Bulgakov's use of a passage from Goethe's *Faust* is likely the major factor which works to create this impression. If the key point of the Faust legend is the bargain struck between the devil and Faust, with emphasis on the point that Faust's soul is at stake, then there is surely no reason to consider The Master and Margarita to be

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[24](cont'd)code, which,if decoded, will reveal what he wanted to say. For some of the more outrageous, but not unusual, examples see, e.g. E.N. Mahlow, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*: The Text as Cipher, (New York: Vantage Press, 1975), K. Rzhevsky, "Pilate's Sin: Cryptography in Bulgakov's Novel *The Master and Margarita*," Canadian Slavonic Papers XIII 1 (Spring 1971), pp. 1-20, and K. Krugovoi, "Gnosticheskii roman M. Bulgakova," Novyi Zhurnal Kn. 134, (New York), 1979, pp. 47-81.

[25] Compare Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 270, "Significantly, the most important source on which the book relies is the Faust tradition with its obvious links to Gnosticism."

[24] E.g. Ibid., p. 270, E. Stenbock-Fermor, "Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Goethe's *Faust*, Slavic and East European Journal, XIII 3 (1969), pp. 309-25, A. Dabezies, Le Mythe de Faust (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972), pp. 191-196, and N. Natov, "Structural and Typological Ambivalence of Bulgakov's Novels Interpreted against the Background of Baxtin's Theory of 'Grotesque Realism' and Carnivalization," American Contributions to the Eighth International Congress of Slavists, (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1978), Vol. II, Literature, pp. 537-49.

right in line with the Faust tradition. Indeed, Margarita makes a deal with the devil,[27] but it turns out that her eternal soul was never at stake. She agrees to serve as Queen at his ball (which is modelled not necessarily on a similar event in Goethe's *Faust*, but on a tradition to which Goethe also probably referred,) in return for having her wish granted. What the possible consequences are is not clear, but Margarita does not fear for her soul, nor is there any emphasis that she is risking eternal damnation, which is Faust's gamble.

There are many points of contact between Goethe's *Faust* and The Master and Margarita,[28] but the relationship does not develop at all systematically. It is reasonable to suggest that the novel is a reworking of the Faust legend which departs radically from tradition. Although this is not very difficult to accept, one is left wondering if the departure is not so radical as to make analysis on the basis of the tradition almost impossible. However, there is a level on which we can comfortably discuss a systematic relationship between Goethe and Bulgakov. Faustian motifs, citations, and references - to the extent that we can posit a 'Faust-motif' as opposed to Faust motifs - occur very frequently,[29]

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[27] Although it is not clearly spelled out. Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, esp. pp. 642-43.

[28] Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 270, gives a partial list including references to a poodle and homunculus, the epigraph, and the names Woland and Margarita. We can add, e.g. the bargain with the devil and the infanticide Frida.

[29] E.g. M. Bulgakov, *Sobach'e serdtse*, (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1969), p. 122, Bulgakov, *Adam i Eva* (Mayenne: Joseph Floch,

and lend strong support for the presence of a philosophical influence of Goethe on Bulgakov - a question I will take up in the appropriate sections below. Furthermore, Bulgakov employs the 'Faust-motif' in order to create an atmospheric effect, or to summon up what could be called a series of 'image-associations', and this corresponds to observations made above on the use he makes of biblical and historical sources in particular. On many occasions Bulgakov employs similar suggestive techniques as, for example, in his use of carefully chosen names[30] which cannot serve to establish any unambigious external relationships, but which, nevertheless, add much to the fabric of his works largely by their suggestive power. This will be referred to again in the discussion of *figura* below.

The question of the literary tradition or movement to which The Master and Margarita belongs remains without a satisfactory answer,[31] unless one accepts Milne's suggestion that it is related to the tradition of Medieval mystery and morality plays.[32] She points out structural, stylistic and thematic parallels, and establishes that the tradition was

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[29](cont'd)1974), eg., pp. 7, 23, 77, Bulgakov, *Teatral'nyi roman* (in) Romany p. 284. And, of course, references, etc., abound in the two major novels. L.E. Belozerskaia-Bulgakova recounts an interesting incident regarding Bulgakov's fondness for Faust in her *O, Med Vospominanii*, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), p. 10.

[30] Such as Behemoth, Abadonna, Ariman and Azazello, or Rimsky, Stravinsky and Berlioz.

[31] Milne, Comedy, pp. 1-2, sums up much of the discussion on this question.

[32] Ibid., pp. 2ff. The White Guard has attracted little attention in this regard, perhaps because it lacks the enigmatic character of The Master and Margarita.

"...common intellectual baggage by the twentieth century in Russia,"[33] and she refers to Maiakovskii's parodies on the tradition.[34] Her contention can be strongly reinforced if we recall Dostoevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,"[35] wherein that author refers to the same tradition. While Wright claims Bulgakov did not care for Dostoevsky,[36] there are paradoxicaly many similarities between The Brothers Karamazov and these two works of Bulgakov. I can hardly begin to develop this contention here, but it may be very instructive to bear in mind that both authors in the above-mentioned works are primarily concerned with questions related to apocalyptic themes and the problems of good and evil, and the existence of God. A conflict between materialist and spiritual approaches to life provides something of a background in both cases. This pattern becomes even more conspicuous if we compare Milne's remarks concerning the relation between The Master and Margarita and certain Russian popular religious traditions[37] and similar remarks made by E. Sandoz concerning Dostoevsky and the same or related traditions,[38] and there are many other details which can serve to fill in the pattern further.[39]

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[33] Ibid., p.3.
[34] Ibid., p.3. I.e. *Misteriia Buf* (Mystery Bouffe) and *Misteriia Osvobozhdennogo Truda* (Mystery of Freed Labor).
[35] F. Dostoevsky, *Brat'ia Karamazovy* ( The Brothers Karamazov), Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh, Vv. XIV-XV, (Leningrad: "Nauka," 1976), esp. pp. 224-5.
[36] Wright, Life and Interpretations, p.6.
[37] Such as the *vertep* and *bursaki*. Milne, Victory, pp. 3-4.
[38] E. Sandoz, Political Apocalypse: A study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), esp. pp. 23-39.
[39] Eg., devils, mental illness, the role of love and

The point is not to argue a generic or etiological relationship between the two, at least not in this study. What I do wish to assert is that in terms of a broader tradition, that of the religious, i.e. Christian novel, the two do have a perceptible commonality, and this points to that which lies beneath them as ground and behind them in tradition.

Apocalyptic trends have been important in many eras of the history of the peoples of the Mediterranean and Europe, but the nineteenth century, with its millenerian movements and political Messianism made Apocalypse in its several meanings one of its outstanding features.[40] With respect to the topic at hand it is especially important that the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia seemed to concentrate on apocalyptic movements.[41] I have in mind here all of the political movements which preached an overthrow of the old order and the building of a new one on the ruins of the old.[42] A number of the artistic and cultural movements of the period shared a similar direction, as did those religious and pseudo-religious movements which flourished under the so-called religious revival of this

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[39](cont'd)forgiveness, mixture of styles and levels, etc.

[40] Sandoz, Political Apocalypse, p. 97., J.L. Talmon, Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), pp. 15ff., 35, 135.

[41] C.f. J. Billington, The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 478,504.

[42] Talmon, Political Messianism, pp. 15-31 passim, and M. Eliade, Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol, Tr. J.M. Cohen, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 155ff.

period.[43] People were looking for a new life in the future, as in the "Myth of the Golden Age."[44] All or many of these groups and movements attained a momentary fulfillment or climax in the Revolution and Civil War of 1917-1922 which is clearly Bulgakov's point of departure in The White Guard . His reference to that understanding of the Revolution and its aftermath which saw in it some sort of New Age of Mankind is clear, although it is not possible to establish whether or not he is specifically polemicizing with any particular groups or movements. It is evident that he is writing an anti-apocalyptic novel, i.e. he is asserting that personal and moral good and human happiness are attainable in the here-and-now and in man himself, and not simply projected into some future golden age, whether on earth or in heaven.[45] Significantly, this question has been the subject of a sharp debate which has been on-going in Christianity since the times of the apostles, and derives from earlier Judaic traditions.[46]

The eschatological tendencies of The Master and Margarita have a different thrust, in that they are not polemical in the same immediate sense, i.e. they do not refer to a debate or controversy which is contemporary to the writing of the novel. In historical perspective there

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[43] Rosenthal, Merezhkovsky, passsim, Billington, Icon, pp. 504ff.
[44] Eliade, Mephistopheles, pp. 13ff.
[45] This suggests an interesting parallel with the views of the Elder Zossima in *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, pp. 257-94.
[46] E. Benz, Evolution and Christian Hope: Man's Concept of the Future from the Early Father's to Teilhard de Chardin, (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1967), pp. 1-19.

was really no debate or controversy by the thirties. Although materialism was not accepted universally, it had clearly won the day, and had the status of established dogma. Accordingly, the focus on the nature of good and evil and of immortality is sharper, and the reflection on their general metaphysical significance for man is more profound. Bulgakov's treatment of these questions is the main subject of this study, and will be taken up in greater detail below. For now, the purpose has been to stress that there is both a literary and intellectual-social context for these questions, and we ought not to be surprised or confounded to find them in Bulgakov's novels.

In order to further define this context reference should be made to other works by Bulgakov. As examples of works which contain explicitly religious elements one can mention especially Flight (*Beg*, 1928)[47] and Adam and Eve (*Adam i Eva*, 1931),[48] and as examples of works which deal with problems which may be related to these religious problems in a general way one can mention The Heart of a Dog (*Sobach'e serdtse*, 1925),[49] and The Fatal Eggs (*Rokovye iaitsa*, 1924)[50]. In the latter two there are themes and motifs which are only indirectly related to religious questions, but when they are put into the context of other works and Bulgakov's opus in general, it is possible to

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[47] M. Bulgakov, *Beg* (in) Selected Works, (Oxford: Pergamom Press, 1972), pp. 111-86.
[48] Bulgakov, *Adam i Eva*
[49] Bulgakov, *Sobach'e serdtse* .
[50] Bulgakov, *Rokovye iaitsa*, (London: Flegon Press, 1970)

demonstrate that they form a part of a whole. Such themes and motifs in these two works include Bulgakov's reflections on nature, the essence of man, the relation between ideology and life, moral responsibility, etc. It should be noted that these problems are not very highly developed in these short works, although they do play a key role. In Adam and Eve and Flight we have a more measured discussion and approach, although the questions dealt with are neither fully probed nor adequately resolved. I want to refer to these two works briefly in order to: a) stress the continuous presence of religious themes in Bulgakov's work and b) to indicate, in particular, two of the techniques he uses with these themes.

In Flight he takes up the themes of guilt and moral responsibility, and the need to reconcile past, present and future in a positive metaphysical order. The "flight" is seen as from oneself, therefore futile, and it is necessary to reconcile the need to escape with the knowledge that the past can be both accounted and atoned for if one assumes the moral responsibility for what has been and ultimately what will be done. Reality is one, and an individual cannot escape it by changing geographical locations. Here we must bear in mind the way in which reality is meshed with the world of dreams, so that arguably no one has really moved, but the dreamer internalizes a certain experience as if it had been lived. This tension between levels of reality does not render the play fantastic, but emphasizes that the flight is fundamentally metaphysical and moral, rather than

physical.

In Adam and Eve the question of moral responsibility is instantiated primarily in two situations, both of which are in flux: on the one hand, that of a scientist and his invention, and on the other, of an ideology and its adherents. Such a division is, of course, only tentative, because the dynamic which develops actually operates on several levels and defies any such division. Ideology is opposed to personal moral freedom and choice; instrumentalist materialism is opposed to a more idealistic approach centered on eternal values; and, again, as one sees nearly everywhere with Bulgakov, there is an attempt to show that instead of belief in the "Myth of the Golden Age," it is necessary to come to terms with the reality one encounters and find in it and especially in oneself, the possibility of happiness.[51] This is a manifestation of Bulgakov's persistent attempt to describe man's metaphysical situation as intrinsically positive: existence is good and evil is non-absolute.[52].

In her study of The Master and Margarita Milne compares certain aspects of Bulgakov's technique to the Medieval technique of *figura*, as described by E. Auerbach[53] It seems that Milne fails to clarify adequately that *figura* is not

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[51] Only in The White Guard and The Master and Margarita does he unambiguously point to a principle which determines this possibiility, namely, God. This will become more apparent in subsequent chapters.

[52]Compare Wright, "World View," p. 161.

[53] E. Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, tr. W.R. Trask, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Unversity Press, 1952).

only a technique but also a concept, a way of viewing reality, so that even if Bulgakov does not use it consistently or canonically in a technical sense, it may be the case that the concept is operative more extensively. I will refer in detail to Auerbach's exposition in Chapter IV below, but for now wish to examine briefly this notion as it pertains to Flight and Adam and Eve.

The figural technique works in terms of a series of images or figures which are exegetic in character. Events and details are subordinated to the purpose of establishing a series of meanings. The historical, social, political and individual significance of the details is minimal.[54] All events take place in a world which is to some extent stripped of its historicality, which explains why, for example, various anachronisms and geographic anomalies are allowed as in the Medieval tradition.[55] This implies that a high degree of "suggestiveness" must be contained in these figures or figural images, in order that the reader's attention be guided in a chosen direction. In the case of Bulgakov, why have a play entitled Adam and Eve, with characters of the same names, which does not clearly follow events of the biblical episode from which they are drawn, or why have readings from scripture which appear to be *non*

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[54] Auerbach, Mimesis, esp. pp. 48-9.
[55] Milne, Comedy, esp. p. 2, and Auerbach, Mimesis, pp. 194-5. The world loses its spatial and historical co-ordinates not in an absolute sense, for events do take place in concrete space and time. However, these cease to be limiting factors in terms of action and especially meaning.

*sequiturs*,[56] or make mention of heaven and hell[57] with no obvious follow-up, etc.? In terms of normal cause and effect relationships these details are not very plausible. However, if we turn to a figural interpretation all of this can be understood in a very probable way. Adam and Eve are figurally related to the "myth" of paradise, man's fall, subsequently to Christ's birth and resurrection, and man's probable return to paradise. In the Christian, as in many other historical and primitive traditions, the return to paradise is to occur after one or a series of cataclysmic events,[58] and this is so in the tradition of political religions also, as with Marxism and various nationalistic movements whose leaders assume messianic poses.[59] Thus, through his discussion of cataclysm, regeneration and paradise, Bulgakov summons forth a whole complex of chiliastic beliefs, especially Christian and Marxist, concerning the future golden age and reasserts the primacy of basic Christian values and a positive metaphysical orientation.

In the case of Flight the figures are somewhat less distinct, but nevertheless we can detect their presence and organize them in a meaningful way. There is a multitude of figural and suggestive images including biblical quotations

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[56] Bulgakov, *Adam i Eva*, egs. pp. 6, 46.
[57] Ibid., p. 30.
[58] C.f. The Book of Revelations and Eliade, Mephistopheles, pp. 133-6, 155-9.
[59] Ibid., pp. 155-9, Talmon, Political Messianism, pp. 15ff.

from Exodus,[60] repetition of the word "saviour",[61] references to St. George[62] and St. Paul,[63] monks and monasteries,[64] lines from songs (Russian and Turkish) which have religious connotations,[65] a calculated use of words and expressions in the stage directions which suggest otherworldliness,[66] references to life and death in a most serious and deliberate manner,[67] and references to God and immortality,[68] etc. For the present we can concentrate on two threads which can be followed throughout, and which subsequently come together. (A) The notion of "flight" is tied to that of exodus in the biblical sense, to a land, if not of milk and honey,[69] then of something better than the present. Thus, the search for paradise again surfaces, although this time not within a directly apocalyptical context. Broadly speaking, one seeks peace, another love, and another release from his conscience. In the end Serafima, Golubkov and Khludov return to the reality which they have rejected. They must reassess it and their decision to flee or seek escape. There is a great deal of soul-searching on the pages of Flight.[70] It leads to the understanding that not by running can one find that which

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[60] Bulgakov, *Beg*, pp. 142, 144, 145.
[61] Ibid., pp. 113, 150, 151.
[62] Ibid., pp. 123, 131.
[63] Ibid., p. 124.
[64] Ibid., pp. 111-151.
[65] Ibid., pp. 168, 186.
[66] Ibid., passim.
[67] Ibid., e.g. pp. 135, 148, 159ff.
[68] Ibid., e.g. pp. 131, 180.
[69] Exodus 3: 8
[70] Bulgakov, *Beg*, e.g. pp. 148, 161-2, 180ff.

one ultimately seeks, but by turning to oneself and by accepting oneself and one's reality. This does not imply acceptance of one political regime as opposed to another, but that existence itself is not, in its essence, any better or worse under one regime than under another.

(B) The other thread is that of salvation and moral responsibility which are interdependent. Khludov will return, not to embrace some new political system, or to purge his political guilt, but to come to grips with his past and, therefore, with himself.[71] He is not seeking death, although death will in all certainty result if he carries through with his decision. He is seeking the salvation which is equivalent to release from the torments of conscience that keep him hovering on the border of insanity. Peace comes only with truth, a theme which is connected with The Master and Margarita.[72]

The manner in which dream and reality are intertwined is very important in both these works.[73]

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[71]Ibid., esp. p. 183.

[72]Notice that Charnota does not return, and continues to run. Compare ibid., pp. 154, 159, 163, etc., where he is constantly seeking a new destination where things might be better. In the end he refers to himself as the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, the Flying Dutchman and the Devil's Hound (p. 185). The first two are synonyms, and the third forms a pair with them. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, they are symbols of one who is condemned to wander until the second coming of Christ, and not find peace. I have not been able to find out what the meaning of the Devil's Hound is, but the other three clearly indicate that there is a relationship to the eschatological-apocalyptic context which I am trying to establish.

[73] Flight in its entirety consists of eight dreams. Within these dreams on several occasions the characters experience or seem to experience dreams or sleep, e.g. pp. 113, 123, 132, 159, 186, and the dreamer of the eight dreams is never

On the one hand, it appears to be merely a technique which allows the author to practice certain liberties in his portrayal of reality - and certainly many have viewed it in this way without further reflection. However, it can be argued that by shifting to another level of reality the author is able to concentrate on problems which would not be immediately accessible on the normal plane. This ties in very well with the notion of figural interpretation insofar as the aim there is to concentrate on certain meanings, beyond the limitations of their significance as concretized historical events, characters, etc. Bulgakov does not call into question the existence of everyday reality but only suggests that there is another dimension. There is a realization that the details of place and time are not of primary importance, but at the same time the problem being treated remains in force. A particularly salient example of the technique of shifting and meshing levels of reality and dream can be found in The White Guard, noteably with respect to Aleksei's dream. In this case we have a very important part of the text supposedly bracketed in a dream, but on closer examination it becomes clear that the division between these two levels is not at all well defined. The result is that one (or more) of the key problems of the novel is brought into focus by removing it from its historical context on one level while leaving it intact on a

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[13](cont'd)identified, if, in fact there is one. Adam and Eve is also cast almost entirely as a dream.

second.'[74] As will be seen below, a similar process can be found in The Master and Margarita.

Much more could be said about the religious aspects of Adam and Eve and Flight and about their importance for obtaining a full understanding of Bulgakov's fiction in general. But now, having provided a context for further discussion, I would like to go on to a discussion of The White Guard and The Master and Margarita, surely the two most interesting and arguably the most artistically successful of Bulgakov's works.

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[74] This will be taken up in greater detail below.

## II. THE WHITE GUARD

"Velik byl god i strashen god po rozhdestve khristovom 1918, ot nachala zhe revoliutsii vtoroi."[75] Two ways of viewing history and, indeed, of viewing reality are contained in this sentence, which sets the tone and context for Bulgakov's first novel, The White Guard. It contains a dichotomy, or to be more accurate, several dichotomies which fill and inspire the novel, and it is to these dichotomies that I will repeatedly turn in this analysis. Specifically, Bulgakov suggests two ways in which the events of 1918 can be understood, i.e. either as points in time like any other points on a time graph, or as part of a new age, having been announced by the Revolution. This dichotomy also sets up an opposition between the spiritual and the material but, on the immediate, historical level, at least, this is secondary. On the level of universals, however, where all historical events, and history in general, are viewed in terms of these two possible perspectives regarding the events of 1918, this facet of the dichotomy emerges as more important.

The meaning of this dichotomy extends to cover the transient and the eternal, and in the last passage of the novel the narrator sums up his views and guides our eyes beyond this world, past Saint Vladimir's cross, to eternity and the real meaning of the novel and of existence:

> Vse proidet. Stradaniia, muki, krov', golod i mor. Mech ischeznet, a vot zvezdy ostanutsia, kogda i

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[75] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, p. 13.

> teni nashikh tel i del ne ostanetsia na zemle. Net ni odnogo cheloveka, kotoryi by ètogo ne znal. Tak pochemu zhe my ne khotim obratit' svoi vzgliad na nikh? Pochemu?'[6]

Arguably, here the views of the narrator can be identified with Bulgakov's views.

Unfortunately, it is common practice to interpret this novel either in terms of its political implications or in terms of the emphasis it puts on the value of family relationships and so-called middle-class values in the context of revolution.[7] Although both politics and the role of the family and related values play a role in the novel they are not its sole or main concern. I will refer to the family and middle-class values below together with a discussion of values in general as they appear in The White Guard.

The political orientation of the novel can best be described as apolitical or even anti-political. All political forces in the novel, whether White, Red, Petliurite or Hetmanite, are criticized more or less evenly, if not by volume, at least according to the purport of the criticisms. While it is obvious that this is so in relation to the depiction of the Petliurite and the Hetmanite forces in the novel, even a brief examination shows that it is equally appropriate in relation to the depiction of Reds and

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[6] Ibid., p. 270.
[7] Cf. E. Proffer, The Major works of Mikhail Bulgakov, (Indiana University Ph. D., 1971), p. 82, Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 68, and Wright, "World View," p. 52, although Wright also recognizes the presence of an important religious dimension. Ibid., pp. 151-3.

Whites. While on the one hand the Bolsheviks are sometimes referred to as historically justified by their aiming to correct the injustices of the old regime,[78] they are also shown to be just another manifestation of the same elements which the Petliurites represented, i.e. primitive force and popular, vigilante justice;[79] Petliurites with red stars.[80] The monarchist-White Guard leanings of the novel's heroes are perhaps not strongly criticized as they pertain to these characters but, on the other hand, they are shown to be anachronous, futile and, in the final analysis, no more respectable than any others. There is something very satirical about the way they try to cling to their belief in the monarch,[81] about their singing of the tsarist anthem,[82] etc. This is strengthened by the portrayal of the 'generals' as cowardly, self-serving, and ineffective.[83] The German military, the Hetman and his hangers-on are depicted similarly. The Turbin family and its friends do not appear as the heroes of the novel because they belong to the White Guard, but because they represent and uphold eternal values in the midst of chaos and transience. Finally, one must bear

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[78] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, pp. 65, 119, 159, 162.
[79] "Da-s smert' ne zamedlila. Ona poshla po osennim a potom zimnim ukrainskim dorogam vmeste s veiushchim snegom...Samoe ee ne bylo vidno, no, iavstvenno vidnee, predshestvoval ei nekii koriavyi muzhichonkov gnev. On bezhal po meteli i kholodu, v dyriavykh laptyshakh, s senom v nepokrytoi svaliavsheisia golove, i vyl. V rukakh on nes velikuiu dubinu, bez kotoroi ne obkhoditsia nikakoe nachinanie na Rusi..." Ibid., p. 73. See also pp. 131, 254.
[80] Ibid., p. 268.
[81] Ibid., pp. 145ff, 221.
[82] Ibid., p. 47.
[83] Ibid., pp. 158, 162, 172.

in mind that the author never examines political ideologies as such. On the contrary, he seems to assert that political ideologies or movements are unable to provide the answers to life's problems and questions, hence the aptness of the label 'apolitical.'

A reading based on a predominance of political themes is probably encouraged if and when The White Guard is read in tandem with or after Days of the Turbins, (*Dni Turbinykh*, 1928)[84] and one suspects that in most cases this has actually taken place.[85] Political overtones are much stronger in Days of the Turbins, and this is so not only in relation to its obviously more pro-Bolshevik stance, but also in general. In his semi- (or pseudo-) autobiographical novel, Theatrical Novel, Bulgakov gives a fictional account of his efforts to have his first work published. There are a large number of parallels between the work being discussed there and The White Guard,[86] and if we accept these, then we can treat as significant one important passage in which he suggests the work was not, in fact, primarily political. Briefly, Rudol'fi submits that the deletion of three words should be sufficient to make publication viable, something which had seemed no more than remotely possible before. The

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[84] Bulgakov, M., *Dni Turbinykh*, (Letchworth, Herts: Prideaux Press, 1970).

[85] This assumption is supported by (a) the publishing history of the two works, and (b) the relative popularity of the latter. Cf. Proffer, The Major Works, pp. 108-113, Wright, Life and Interpretations, pp. 83-95, and M. Bulgakov, *Teatral'nyi roman*. (See below)

[86] Compare Wright, Life and Interpretations, pp. 83, 230-231.

three words are "apocalypse," "archangels," and "devil."[87]

The apocalypse is the central recurring theme of The White Guard. It is introduced in the epigraphs,[88] and appears by means of symbols such as the number 666[89] and the anti-Christ[90] and by suggestive images including that of the storm[91] and of galloping horses,[92] relevant stylization,[93] and direct quotations from the Book of Revelations.[94] In The White Guard Bulgakov challenges the apocalyptic interpretation of history according to which cataclysmic events are seen as foreshadowing the end of time itself, or the end of an age or an era and the beginning of a new Golden Age.

The Apocalypse had been a common and important theme in 19th century political and religious thinking both explicitly and implicitly. The millenarian movements consciously evoked the coming end of the world, while political movements sought to build a new and glorious world on the ruins of one which they would overturn or destroy.

In the early part of the 20th century in Russia apocalyptic thinking became very prominent not only in political and religious thought, but in art as well, due in

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[87] Bulgakov, *Teatral'nyi roman*, p. 287.
[88] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, p. 13.
[89] Ibid., p. 163.
[90] Ibid., p. 257, where there are other symbols as well.
[91] Ibid., passim.
[92] "Gremiat torbany, svishchet solovei stal'nym vintom, zasekaiut shompolami nasmert' liudei, edet, edet chernoshlichnaia konnitsa na goriachikh loshadiakh." Ibid., p. 64.
[93] Ibid., e.g. pp. 13, 254, 268.
[94] Ibid., e.g. pp. 16, 258, 268.

large part to the work of Vl. Soloviev.'[5] This phenomenon was no novelty in Russian culture. In fact, one can refer to a tradition of near obsession with apocalyptic themes and ideas in the east Slavic territories.'[6] The Byzantine inheritance,'[7] together with cruel, primitive conditions and the concomitant ignorance and relative passivity of the people, encouraged this type of future-oriented and present-negating thinking. Popular rebellion, which was a common occurrence, frequently had apocalyptic overtones,'[8] as did popular interpretations of all major events which harbored some sort of dramatic change or widespread effects, such as war and famine.

The Revolution, of course, was subject to interpretation in apocalyptic terms on several levels: popular, ideological, religious, etc., and Bulgakov refers to the most important of them in The White Guard. On one level many people considered that the end of time was at hand, that the anti-Christ had appeared, etc. This response followed a relatively well-established pattern.'[9] To mention only some of the more outstanding cases from modern times, three figures stand out. Peter the Great was considered by the broad masses to be the anti-Christ.'[10] The Pugachev uprising was also seen in that light by many.'[11] Indeed,

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[5] Billington, The Icon and the Axe, pp. 478, 505.
[6] Ibid., e.g. pp. 56, 514-515.
[7] Ibid., pp. 5-6.
[8] Ibid., pp. 199-200.
[9] Ibid., pp. 56, 59, 75, etc.
[10] Ibid., pp. 180, 192.
[11] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

there are a number of very important direct and indirect references to Pugachev and his rebellion in the text of The White Guard, beginning with the first epigraph .[102] Napoleon was also thought to be the anti-Christ,[103] and he also is referred to in the text directly and indirectly.[104] The numerous references to Alexander I and Borodino[105] are not only literary, and perhaps philosophical, allusions to War and Peace, but also to the apocalyptic aspect of the Napoleonic wars. In view of the tradition of apocalyptic thinking in Russia it is not at all surprising that many viewed the revolution and its leaders within the bounds of this tradition, nor is it surprising that Bulgakov should write about it.

The other level, on which apocalyptic themes operate, and which is not entirely separate from the first, is ultimately more important within the novel. On this level cataclysmic events are viewed as a sign of the end of an age and the beginning of a new Golden Age. This sort of theory seems to have guided most people's view of the revolution, and it is easy to see how it might have been influenced by the deep-rooted prevalence of the just discussed tradition of apocalyptic thinking. Bulgakov's position is diametrically opposed to this. He suggests that these

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[102] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, p. 13. Cf. also p. 73, where the image of a peasant uprising is strongly elicited, and pp. 15, 220, etc. Following the lead of the epigraph all of the references to storms can be related to Pugachev and Pugachevshchina. (See below.)

[103] Billington, The Icon and the Axe, pp. 282-283.

[104] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia* pp. 73, 93.

[105] Ibid., pp. 93, 98, 100-101, 111, 255, etc.

so-called cataclysms are actually nothing more than "storms."[106] They appear frequently and irregularly and nothing essential is changed in their wake. Pugachev came and went, like a large winter storm, as did Napoleon, and in his turn, Petliura: "Bylo ego zhitiia v Gorode sorok sem' dnei."[107] Only weeks earlier people had been talking of Petliura and the end of the world in the same breath, but he went the way of those who came before him. And now the Bolsheviks are coming, and the same popular-apocalyptic atmosphere attends their approach.[108] However, the suggestion is made that this is not the beginning of the new age, just another in a long series of major events, which by definition are both temporary and recurrent, like all things of this world. Inevitably, only those things which are truly eternal will remain.[109]

Although apocalyptic thinking does assume a variety of forms, and several of these are present in the text, Bulgakov clearly has in mind a criticism of all apocalyptic thinking, i.e. all theories which either interpret events and history, or which project themselves into history apocalyptically. Thus at one and the same time he criticizes those who see the end of the world hanging on every large upheaval, and those who propose that the implementation of

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[106] As mentioned above the image of the storm is used to evoke that of revolution beginning with the epigraph from Pushkin's *Kapitanskaia dochka*, and it continues throughout the novel. For a sampling of references see pp. 15, 101, 159, 160, 254, 255.
[107] Ibid., p. 254.
[108] Ibid., pp. 255, 257, 260, 263, 264, 268.
[109] Ibid., p. 270.

one or another program or ideology will lead to the building of a new paradise on earth. He suggests that the former will not come to pass within the context of these earthly cataclysms, and that the type of earthly paradise intended in the latter will never come to be. He encourages us to live in this world, to see it for what it is worth and to seek joy and happiness and peace in our personal lives, behind our "cream-coloured curtains."[110]

Just as the presence of death is felt throughout the novel - the Turbins' mother's death,[111] the numerous anonymous and semi-anonymous deaths during the fighting, the death of Nai-Turs,[112] Aleksei's near death,[113] etc., - so the force of life surges through it with even greater strength. The Turbins' mother exhorts her family from her deathbed to "live."[114] God says the same to Zhilin in Aleksei's dream,[115] and Aleksei counsels the syphilitic poet, Rusakov, in a similar manner.[116] 'Live', thus expressed in the seldom used imperative, is associated with hope,[117] with courage and desire to go on in the face of all adversity, and with the ability to enjoy, to bear what life

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[110] Ibid., p. 199. Cf. also p. 19, 43, 179, etc.
[111] Ibid., pp. 13-15.
[112] Ibid., pp. 148-151.
[113] Ibid., esp. pp. 174ff.
[114] Ibid., p. 15. She is first quoted as saying "Druzhno...zhivite," following which the narrator puts emphasis on the "live" part of the quotation. In the next instance she says "zhivite," which the narrator contrasts with suffering and death.
[115] Ibid., p. 72.
[116] Ibid., p. 256.
[117] Hope itself is an important theme in the novel especially associated with Elena. Ibid., pp. 252-253. Cf. also pp. 15-16.

brings, not stoically, but with the optimistic confidence that something good will come of it, that, as the narrator puts it, "... vse, chto ni proiskhodit, vsegda tak, kak nuzhno, i tol'ko k luchshemu."[''] There are a number of secondary characters, e.g. Lariosik, Myshlaevskii, Nai-Turs, etc., who, by virtue of their strength, optimism or vitality, serve as examples and help to reinforce the novel's life affirming principle.

The action of the novel is centred around Christmas, i.e. the day of celebration of the birth of Christ. This has a two-fold function. To begin with, it sharpens the contrast between the outside and the inside, as it were, i.e. between the personal and family life on the one hand, and the fighting, misery and cruelty on the other. One of the central meanings of Christmas in this context is that it is perhaps the most important time of the year for families, especially in the Orthodox-Slavic world, where Christmas has taken over many features of the older pagan cults of the ancestors. It is a time of warmth, joy and togetherness, celebration, and uplifting of hearts.[''] The second function of Christmas in the novel is discerned when we think of Christmas not as a yearly celebration but as the actual birth of Christ, 1,918 years earlier. Whether one is a Christian or not, this is one of the most important events

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[''] Ibid., p. 14. This seems to be the guiding idea of the novel. Compare the meeting between Aleksei and Nikolka on Malo-Proval'naia Street at the end of the novel, p. 260.
[''] Note the key role of the hearth (stove) as an eternal symbol of family unity. Ibid., e.g. pp. 14, 18, 134.

in the history of western man and even for humanity in general. Bulgakov sees this and poses the following question: Is it (i.e. the birth of Christ) to be supplanted in our understanding by the Revolution as the watershed of the age in which we live?'[120]

Although it is not so explicitly mentioned in the text, Christmas is immediately associated with Easter. These are the two main events of the New Testament tradition: the arrival of the Messiah, the God-man, and the ultimate act in which the whole meaning of man, of life, of Christianity is realized and fulfilled - all this is contained in these two events, and it can be said that they are both implied in the figure of Christmas.'[121]

Of course, the other biblical figure (i.e. as used by Auerbach and Milne), in the novel is that of the Apocalypse. The book of Revelations is both the book of death and the book of life, in the sense of the afterlife, but Bulgakov, proceeding hermeneutically, suggests that for him the Apocalypse is life, that our fate in this life and in the next is to be conditioned by a desire to 'live'. In other words, he rejects the traditional 'end of the world' interpretations of the Apocalypse with their fixation on death, damnation and destruction. This is most immediately

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[120] This is quite explicitly formulated in the opening sentence of the novel, and implied very often throughout. Cf. as an analogy the French "Revolutionary" Calendar.
[121] Note that Aleksei's recovery which, it is implied, is effected with the aid of divine agencies (Ibid., pp. 251-254), takes place on Christmas eve and is likened to a resurrection. Ibid., p. 254.

and somehow intuitive: honesty, goodness, integrity, courage, etc.

Although the question of good and evil is not deeply probed or even clearly formulated in The White Guard the way it is in The Master and Margarita, the narrator does provide material for general reflections on questions of morality. Through his novel Bulgakov seems to suggest that morality ought to be decided on the basis of those values which he holds up as the most important, i.e. courage, honesty, love, integrity and the inherent worth of family relations. His position is non-dogmatic, yet the values he affirms belong to the realm of ideals. He is saved from absolutism by not insisting on superhuman adherence to these as moral precepts. As is evident in his characterizations, he recognizes man's human limitations,[124] and this is also brought out by his emphasis on "living" life. At the same time, he does not insist on belief in a deity as a *sine qua non* of morality or salvation. This neither denies the deity nor his role, but places a very high value on human responsibility and free action. He suggests that all men have an intuition of eternity or immortality, and this should somehow inspire their actions.[125] If, as is suggested in several passages,[126] the next life will reflect what one has done in this life, then the function of this type of morality is evident. It is more descriptive than

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[124] In this sense, none of his charactersis idealized.
[125] Bugakov, Belaia gvardiia, esp. p. 270.
[126] Ibid., pp. 13, 68-73, 268. Compare p. 38 below.

prescriptive, just as the possibilities in the afterlife are non-absolute, i.e. they are not limited to heaven and hell, positive or negative.'[27] At the same time, while remaining non-absolute, the moral position he has assumed is neither relativistic nor subjective. The actions which appear as positive in the novel always seem to be guided by that same set of eternal, ideal values mentioned above.

It is also not correct to say that these values are "middle-class," as has been surprisingly suggested by one of Bulgakov's soberest critics.'[28] "Middle-class" is primarily a socio-economic category, and even as such is extremely ambiguous. It may be possible to speak of typical middle-class values in terms of social and economic aspirations, but we would not be a single step closer to that about which Bulgakov is writing, and which Wright has erroneously termed "middle-class". If we accept his obviously carelessly formed evaluation, concurrent with it we must accept The White Guard as some sort of lament for "the good old days." Obviously, this study disputes such a contention. Governments and regimes change, but the lives and fundamental values of the Turbins do not. There is no lament, and no "good old days." They continue to 'live' behind their cream-coloured curtains, and they become older and wiser, but do not cease to hold in high esteem that which they always did, for these things, like Faust and the

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'[27] There is an implication that evil is relative insofar as there is no clear mention of hell, purgatory or eternal damnation.

'[28] Wright, World View, pp. 151ff.

Carpenter of Saardam, are eternal.'[129]

Bulgakov's concern with questions of morality and fundamental religious issues is underlined by his concern with the question of immortality. In The Master and Margarita this problem is developed much more extensively, but it is also of no small importance in The White Guard. There are at least five key passages in the text in which the action and problematic of the novel are referred to a context of immortality or eternity. What separates a religious or spiritual viewpoint from a materialistic viewpoint is precisely the notion of immortality,'[130] and Bulgakov both realized and exploited this. In the materialist's conception any and all meaning accruing to human existence is confined to and realizable in this world only, and for a given human being, in his own lifetime. The religious person sees his actions and their meaning as transcending this world, and this is clearly and unequivocally affirmed in The White Guard.

The five passages which demonstrate this most clearly are the funeral scene, Aleksei's dream, Elena's mystical experience, the final scene of Rusakov reading from the Bible, and the narrator's closing words. Only in Aleksei's

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'[129] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, p. 34.

'[130] Compare Ivan Karamazov's formula of "Vse pozvoleno," (Dostoevsky, *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, e.g. p. 240), which was expressed by Dostoevsky in a number of ways. For example, in a letter to N.L. Osmidov, of February, 1878, he says, "...personal immortality and God are one and the same - an identical idea." (This remark is in brackets in the original.) Quoted in A Treasury of Russian Life and Humor, ed. J. Cournos, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1943), p. 58.

dream'[31]' is there a description of the afterlife and a causal explanation (however incomplete) of its relationship to life on earth. The most important points are the following: 1) Heaven (paradise) is not reserved for the faithful. On the contrary, Zhilin reports that God doesn't really care one way or the other whether one believes in him or not. "Ved' mne-to ot ètogo ni zharko ni kholodno...Potomu mne ot vashei very ni pribyli, ni ubytku."[32] Both Reds and Whites can be met walking in paradise. 2) A man's future destiny seems to reflect his earthly life, or what he has made of himself. Both Zhilin and Nai-Turs have assumed a form similar to their earthly form, only more concentrated or rarified, as if something of their essence had been distilled or purified, and then poured back into the same mould. 3) Paradise is paradise, in the sense that one's problems have come to an end, and the power of the deity is much more immediately evident than on earth, though He Himself remains enigmatic.

The other passages in which the notion of immortality is singled out are, as has been said, less explicit, but they indicate that not all final explanations or resolutions are to be attained in this earthly existence. In a sense, the question of immortality joins the problems of good and evil and morality to that of God's existence and his role in man's life. It cannot be by chance that the two novels being discussed here - arguably Bulgakov's two major works - both

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[31] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, esp. pp. 68-73.
[32] Ibid., p. 72.

begin with an affirmation of God's existence'[133] and end with a positive reference to eternity.'[134]

During the funeral scene at the beginning of The White Guard, the narrator describes God as an "enigmatic old man"'[135] who proffers no answer to Nikolka's great metaphysical "why?" This 'why' is the question which inspires all metaphysical inquiry,'[136] whether it be formulated 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'[137] or 'Why does a perfectly good God permit evil to exist?', or Nikolka's 'Why did this have to happen?'. His question refers not only to the apparent absurdity of his mother's death at such an inopportune time, but also to the inexplicability of the entire course of human life, its unexplained sorrows, joys, emptiness, success, etc. And the narrator's affirmation of the essential meaningfulness of each and every moment in our lives - "...vse, chto ni proiskhodit, vsegda tak, kak nuzhno, i tol'ko k luchshemu,"[138] is as profound as the question it answers. It expresses a basic elemental affirmation of man and his existence, and posits an infinite power - God - as the

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[133] Ibid., esp. p. 14, and Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 423-463.
[134] Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, pp. 268-270, and *Master i Margarita*, pp. 774-799, i.e. excluding the epilog.
[135] "...zagadochnyi starik bog," Bulgakov, *Belaia gvardiia*, p. 14.
[136] Compare K. Campbell, Metaphysics: An Introduction, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 1-22, and M. Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, tr. R. Manheim, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1959).
[137] Heidegger, Introduction, pp. 1-51.
[138] Bulgakov, Belaia gvardiia, p. 14.

orderer of the universe.'[13]

All of the various concerns and problems which have been discussed in this chapter - elements of an unmistakably religious world view - reappear in augmented or diminished form in The Master and Margarita . These will be taken up in the next chapter.

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[13]Compare the discussion in Chapters I and II of The Master and Margarita.

## III. THE MASTER AND MARGARITA

"Imeite v vidu, chto Iisus sushchestvoval."[140] This statement, affirming Christ's existence,[141] is one of the most important statements found in Bulgakov's novel, The Master and Margarita. Its speaker, Woland, stresses that it is not simply a point of view, nor is it in need of proof,[142] it simply is the case.

Perhaps a sociological analysis of contemporary criticism would be the best starting point in any discussion of why practically all critics and scholars of Bulgakov conspicuously and consistently refuse to consider in a serious and straightforward manner the religious dimension of The Master and Margarita. This is not surprising so long as we are talking about Soviet scholars, but for western scholars there is surely no excuse other than indifference, insensitivity or the desire to be fashionable. There is a profusion of material in the text which supports the contention that The Master and Margarita is, in fact, a religious novel. This does not imply that it is not also a work of humor, political and social satire and criticism, etc. For two reasons I have chosen not to examine these kinds of questions here. First of all, they have already received a great deal of attention, and secondly, and more importantly, their proper evaluation is impossible without

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[140] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 435.
[141] As shown below it explicitly affirms the existence of Christ as understood within the Christian tradition, not simply the existence of a fictional Jeshua.
[142] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 435.

first coming to grips with the religious and metaphysical questions which form their conceptual underpinnings.

Metaphysical views (including religious ones) necessarily condition all others. This is an inherent presupposition of all serious political thought, natural and social science, ethical theory, etc., for in all these endeavours and disciplines metaphysical concepts implicitly precede theory forming, directed experimentation, etc., on a fundamental level where concepts of causality, epistemology and,'[43] in general, the nature of man and reality determine all others. Thus, if it is possible to uncover Bulgakov's fundamental religious and metaphysical views we shall be that much closer to a fuller and more complete understanding of all aspects of this often misunderstood author.

In this way, the above quotation affirming Christ's existence ought to be viewed as the cornerstone of Bulgakov's world view. Indeed, the whole novel is centered around it, just as the author's conceptual world is. The novel's opening chapter is clearly centered on the question of God's existence. It revolves mainly around a discussion about whether or not Christ existed, and Berlioz, Bezdomnyi and Woland are the interlocutors. Passing over details for the moment, it is of crucial importance in attempting to develop a consistent and plausible interpretation of the novel to note that Chapter II, entitled "Pontii Pilat," is offered as an explanation, or expansion of Woland's remarks

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'[43] Ibid., p. 435.

in Chapter I. There is a strictly causal relation between the two.'[44] Chapter III is again closely tied to the same question - it is a response to and further development of those same problems which are taken up in Chapter I.'[45] The title of Chapter III, "Sed'moe dokazatel'stva ," leaves little room for doubt. In fact, almost every major episode of the book is related conceptually and/or causally to this question of the existence of a deity as conceived and formulated by Bulgakov in Chapter I. Obviously, the Jerusalem chapters continue the narration begun in Chapter II.'[46] The Master and Margarita are involved with Woland primarily in his capacity as a supernatural power.'[47] The development of the character of Ivan centers around his encounter with Woland and his gradual realization that there is another extra-material dimension to reality. Satan's ball, especially the revelation of Berlioz' fate and the improvement in Frida's situation, are closely tied to this question. Of crucial importance in this respect is the penultimate chapter, "Proshchenie i vechnyi priiut," which reunites the two apparent levels of the novel, i.e., the Jerusalem and the Moscow chapters. Considering this chapter

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'[44]Ibid., p. 435.

'[45] Ibid., pp. 459-460. Woland clearly states that his story, i.e. Chapter II, relates to the discussion of Chapter I, and is meant as evidence for his affirmation that Christ existed.

'[46] Although there are ostensibly three narrators, Woland, Ivan and the Master, there is a distinct continuity and unity among all the chapters belonging to the Jerusalem sections of the novel, and this reinforces the notion that they refer to or are linked with an objective reality.

'[47] I.e. as opposed to his supposed guise as a practitioner of black magic.

to be climactic the following can be observed: confirmation of the opening assertion of Christ's existence, (and the world order thereby implied) is provided, the Master's novel is shown to be 'true', and the major characters are rewarded for the lives they have led; a number of other points are made, especially in terms of the problem of evil, and the nature of human immortality, but the key point is the conclusion that there is a God and that He is an infinitely powerful Being Who rules and orders the universe.'[148]

Bearing in mind that "for whatever reason a person approaches the question of the existence of God, it is a significant question,"[149] let us return now to the first chapter and examine in some detail the various ways in which it is suggested that the notion of God's existence is valid. The discussion between Berlioz and Bezdomnyi evolves on the level of history. Their question is "was Jesus a historical person or not."[150] For them the question of his divinity is immaterial. Thus neither they nor Woland pursue the question in the manner of Renan, for the notion of Christ as an extremely remarkable person does not come up except in Bezdomnyi's poem, which is their point of departure. It is Woland who shifts the plane of the discussion to a higher level. He moves very quickly from the question of Jesus'

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[148] That He shares his power with Woland on the basis of a sort of dominion will be referred to below.
[149] Philosophy of Religion, p. 162.
[150] "Berlioz zhe khotel dokazat' poètu, chto glavnoe ne v tom, kakov byl Iisus, plokh li, khorosh li, a v tom, chto Iisusa-to ètogo, kak lichnosti, vovse ne sushchestovovalo na svete i chto vse rasskazy o nem--prostye vydumki, samyi obyknovennyi mif."Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 425.

historical existence to the general question "do you believe in God?" Of course, his interlocutors respond negatively, whereupon he refers to the five proofs of God's existence. Berlioz replies:

> Uvy...ni odno iz ètikh dokazetel'stv nichego ne stoit, i chelovechestvo davno sdalo ikh v archiv. Ved' soglasites', chto v oblasti razuma nikakogo dokazatel'stva sushchestvovaniia boga byt' ne mozhet.'[151]

Before we follow their conversation as it proceeds to Kant, a couple of points are noteworthy. First of all, Woland and the 'learned' Berlioz strongly agree that there are five proofs of God's existence. The term 'five proofs' traditionally refers to Aquinas' five proofs for the existence of God based on the contingency of existence (*argumentum a contingentia mundi*), found in his *Summa Theologiae*.'[152] These five proofs play a large role in the novel as we shall see, but there exist several others,'[153] equally sophisticated and well known, which he does not mention. Presumably, for artistic reasons, he could not devote too much space in the novel to such particulars without developing it into a theological treatise and, I submit, he is also displaying a personal preference, since the development of the question in the novel follows roughly

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[151] Ibid., p. 429.
[152] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. II, Existence and the Nature of God (1a. 2-11), (London: Blackfriars and Eyre and Spattiswoode, 1964).
[153] Including the 'ontological argument', the 'argument from design', the arguments from the existence of moral values, and from intuition, etc. C.f. Philosophy of Religion, pp. 167-247.

Aquinas' line of argument.[154]

The discussion then turns to Kant. He demolished the five proofs, they agree,[155] and for reasons with which Berlioz is in total agreement.[156] However, despite negative opinion of such endeavors, Kant proceeded to formulate his own proof, which is in no way superior to its predecessors.[157] A delightfully humorous scene ensues following which Woland suddenly returns to the heart of the matter: "No vot kakoi vopros menia bespokoit: ezheli boga net, to, sprashivaetsia, kto zhe upravliaet zhizh'iu chelovecheskoi i vsem voobshche rasporiadkom na zemle?"[158] All of Aquinas' five ways, as the five proofs are called, bear a strong similarity to each other, in that they argue to that which is necessary, necessarily first, uncaused and the source of all else, and it is for this reason that they are classed together as "The Cosmological Proof."[159]

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[154] Aquinas, *Summa*, Question 2, Article 3.
[155] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 429. In fact, Kant's most famous 'demolition' is of the Ontological argument. Philosphy of Religion, pp. 174-179.
[156] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 429.
[157] Ibid., p. 429.
[158] Ibid,. p. 430.
[159] Since I am not here to discuss Aquinas, I have taken the liberty to reproduce a rather lengthy quotation from J. Owens, C.Ss.R., An Elementary Christian Metaphysics (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1963), which gives a brief introduction to the 'five proofs'. "In current Scholastic manuals and monographs the accepted philosophical arguments for the existence of God are regularly drawn up according to the 'Five Ways' sketched in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* by St. Thomas Aquinas. There they are outlined very concisely, and without the detailed treatment that is necessary to make each link in their reasoning cogent. The extensively detailed development that lies back of the 'First Way', or argument from motion, may be seen in the *Contra Gentiles* and in the explanation of its principles

Woland's question, however, resembles very closely the formulation of the question in Aquinas' second and third ways, i.e. the arguments from 'efficient causality' and from 'probable and necessary being'.'[6]

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'[5]'(cont'd)as given in St Thomas' commentaries on the Aristotelian *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. The other four 'Ways' are similarly presented in so sketchy a fashion that a correspondingly deep and complicated background in the other works of St. Thomas may be presumed. The arrangement in 'five ways' is not repeated or referred to elsewhere in the works of St. Thomas, even in those written later than the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*....The arrangement under the 'Five Ways,' however, is still in the mold in which the arguments considered valid by modern Scholastic writers are usually cast, with the occasional addition of some sixth 'way' that a particular author considers acceptable. The 'Five Ways' therefore, demand careful consideration from a metaphysical viewpoint. By most commentators they are looked upon as five separate demonstrations. By others they are regarded in various ways as just one demonstration based upon existence, but presented in five different contexts." Pp. 341-342.

'[6] The second and third ways are reproduced here following J.F. Ross, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, (London: Collier MacMillan Ltd., 1969), pp. 29-32, who remains faithful to the original.

Second Way

1)Some things stand in an essential ordering of efficient causes.

2)Nothing can be an efficient cause of its own being (a priori).

3)A series of (essentially ordered) efficient causes of being cannot be infinite. (a priori)

4)Therefore, there is a first efficient cause (which is uncaused).

In addition:

a). For everything which is an efficient cause there is either another efficient cause or there is some self-explanation for its being.

b).It is necessary that for everything...

Third Way

1)Some things are such that both to be and not to be are possible for them.

2)It is impossible for these things always to exist (a priori).

3)If everything can not-be, then at one time there was nothing (a priori).

There can be little doubt, based on this similarity and on reference to the 'five proofs', and to Kant, that Bulgakov had in mind Aquinas' arguments when formulating his position. While accepting their inconclusiveness, the intuitive force of the arguments is stressed. This is why Woland, although he agrees that Kant and everyone else is right, returns to the same argument, and shows that the same questions which motivated Aquinas and Kant remain in effect despite any and all attempts at dismissing them.

Bezdomnyi's reply: "Sam chelovek i upravliaet,"[161] which Woland takes up at some length and rejects,[162] is like that formulated by Aquinas as Objection 2 in the same Article.

> ...Now it seems that everything we observe in this world can be fully accounted for by other causes, without assuming a God. Thus, natural effects are explained by natural causes; and contrived effects by human reasoning and will. There is therefore no need to suppose that a God exists.'[163]

The second part of the Objection is strikingly similar to Bezdomnyi's suggestion that man rules himself. Woland disposes of this suggestion, but then Berlioz suggests that nature, i.e. chance, plays a key role in man's destiny, just as was suggested in the first part of Aquinas' Objection:

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[160](cont'd)4)If at one time nothing existed, nothing would now exist (a priori).
If at one time nothing existed, it would be impossible for anything to begin to exist (a priori).
6)Therefore, not all things can not-be, (and some things can begin to exist).
7)Therefore, something exists which cannot not-be and has this attribute of itself.

[161] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 430.
[162] Ibid., pp. 430-431.
[163] Aquinas *Summa* Question 2, Article 3, Objection 2.

> ...Segodniashnii vecher mne izvesten bolee ili menee tochno. Samo soboiu razumeetsia, chto, esli na Bronnoi mne svalitsia no golovu kirpich... '[64]

Woland's reply is starkly unequivocal: "Kirpich ni s togo ni s sego,... nikomu i nikogda na golovu ne svalitsia,'[65] indicating that things are purposefully ordered or caused.

At this point Woland makes predictions regarding the time and manner of Berlioz' death, and the conversation turns to more immediate concerns. Suddenly, with humor and urgency Woland returns to the question they had been discussing by remarking "Imeite v vidu, chto Iisus sushchestvoval."'[66] Subsequently, he disclaims Berlioz' suggestion that they simply have differing points of view. "A ne nado nikakikh tochek zrenii!,"'[67] i.e. he asserts there is an objective truth or reality to which he refers, and which is generally accessible, and he also waves aside the need for proof: "I dokazatel'stv nikakikh ne trebuetsia."'[68] He then proceeds to the story of Christ and Pilate. The end of this chapter'[69] and the beginning of the third'[70] leave no doubt whatsoever that the story of Jeshua is to be understood as the story of Jesus, otherwise these sections make no sense at all in the context of the novel.

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'[64] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 432.
'[65] Ibid., p. 432.
'[66] Ibid., p. 435.
'[67] Ibid.
'[68] Ibid.
'[69] I.e. the discussion of Christ's existence which leads him to tell his story.
'[70] E.g. direct comparison with the accuracy of the Biblical account.

In Chapter II two passages are particularly important for the present discussion. In the first, Jeshua repeats Woland's argument concerning the contingency of existence and the need for an ultimate causal agent.[171] Interestingly, the passage reflects both a similar passage in John 19:10,11,[172] and Aquinas' formulation of the cosmological argument. In a second passage Jeshua asserts that there is only one God, and that he believes in Him.[173] This is perfectly consistent with the interpretation of Chapter I as proposed here, and further significance will be indicated in the discussion below of demythologizing and of good and evil.

Chapter III is "Sed'moe dokazatel'tvo." ". Here, Bulgakov takes artistic liberty to make his point as strongly as possible. Woland claims to have been an eye-witness to the events he has described in Chapter II, which took place nearly 2,000 years earlier,[174] and this suffices to convince Berlioz and Bezdomnyi that he is definitely insane.[175] While the latter two try to decide how to handle this 'lunatic,' Woland asks of them: "A d'iavola tozhe net?"[176]

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[171] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p.443.
[172] "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin'."
[173] "Bog odin,...V nego ja veriu." Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 448.
[174] Ibid., pp. 459-460.
[175] Ibid., p. 460.
[176] Ibid., p. 461. Compare the discussion between Ivan and

He tries arduously to elicit a positive response, but none is forthcoming.'[177] He reminds Berlioz that there is, in fact, a seventh proof which is about to be demonstrated.'[178]

This is an extremely interesting juncture in Bulgakov's concept of cosmic order. He clearly suggests that at least two levels of causality exist, and that they operate independently of each other. At first glance it seems that Bulgakov is proposing a straightforward theory of predestination: Berlioz is predestined to fall under a tram and have his head lopped off, and all the surrounding details also seem equally pre-ordained.'[179] In fact, this is the case, and it is clear that there is nothing to be done about it. But there is another chain of events which does not reveal its progression until Chapter XXIII.'[180] Woland confronts Berlioz (or actually Berlioz' head) at the ball with the details of the 'seventh proof', and in accordance with a certain theory, ("Kazhdomu budet dano po ego vere,")'[181] Berlioz is blasted into oblivion.'[182] Bulgakov is intimating that although Berlioz could do absolutely nothing about the tram, if he had been open to belief in God or the devil, or presumably something beyond and greater than

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[177](cont'd)his father in *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, "'V poslednii raz i reshitel'no: est' bog ili net? Ia v poslednii raz!' 'I v poslednii raz net?' '...A chert est'?' 'Net, i cherta net!'," p. 124.
[179] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 461.
[178] Ibid., p. 461. "Imeite v vidu, chto na èto sushchestvuet sed'moe dokazatel'stvo, i uzh samoe nadezhnoe! I vam ono seichas budet pred"iavleno."
[179] Ibid., p. 342
[180] "Velikii bal u Satany," Ibid., pp. 676-691.
[181] Ibid., p. 689.
[182] Ibid., p. 689.

himself, he could have prepared a different 'afterlife' for himself. Very subtly and sensitively Bulgakov has presented his resolution of a serious theological and metaphysical question, namely that of the conflict between moral freedom and an ordered cosmos, which involves the formulation of the problem of evil, and which is also intimately and indivisibly tied to the problem of the existence of God.

Throughout the novel the problem of the existence of God continues to appear, but for the most part, less explicitly. The reader must bear in mind, however, in relation to the matter's being explicit or otherwise, that Bulgakov, through Woland, has stated clearly that the existence of God and the existence of the devil are intimately connected,'[83] and Woland picks this up towards the end of the novel once more.'[84] Throughout the novel the existence of the devil is questioned by the myriad of secondary characters who encounter him, and while the cosmic and eternal consequences of each of these minor encounters is not immediately clear, it obviously must be sought in the context of the question of good and evil, and the specific relation of the devil to the world.

The problem of evil is closely tied to the question of God's existence, and for many it has been the greatest of

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'[83] Ibid., "No umoliaiu vas na proshchan'e, pover'te khot' v to, chto d'iavol sushchestvuiet! O bol'shem ia uzh vas i ne proshu...," p. 461. The context suggests that even if Berlioz was not willing to admit the existence of God, he could still save his soul if he were at least to admit to the existence of the devil. This is confirmed at Satan's ball. P. 689.

'[84] Ibid., pp. 776-777.

all problems. It is central in the history of Western thought, and plays a large role in The Master and Margarita. Perhaps it is not insignificant that Aquinas also saw fit to take it up in the same article of the *Summa* in which he treats God's existence. In the first Objection we read:

> It seems that there is no God. For if, of two mutually exclusive things, one were to exist without limit, the other would cease to exist. But by the word 'God' is implied some limitless good. If God then existed, nobody would ever encounter evil. But evil is encountered in the world. God therefore does not exist.'[15]

Aquinas' formulation seems, by its subtlety, to almost understate the question, at least in comparison to Ivan Karamazov's formulation,'[16] but it is always a very powerful and persuasive argument.

From the very outset of the novel, indeed beginning with the epigraph, Bulgakov turns the reader's attention to the problem of evil.

> ...tak kto zh ty, nakonets? --Ia--chast' toi sily, chto vechno khochet zla i vechno sovershaet blago.'[17]

Many'[18] have been deceived by this epigraph into thinking that it is a definition of Bulgakov's devil (Woland) as it was a definition of Mephistopheles for Goethe.'[19]

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'[15] Aquinas, *Summa*, Question 2, Article 3, Objection 1.
'[16] Dostoevsky, *Brat'ia Karamazovy*, pp. 214-215ff.
'[17] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 423.
'[18] Compare Stenbock-Fermor, "Bulgakov," p. 309.
'[19] The epigraph could be and, it seems, has been, very misleading. Although Mephistopheles is not an unambiguous figure, there is no doubt that his intentions are evil. He seeks nothing less than Faust's damnation. Woland reveals no such sinister traits, therefore it is surely not possible to accept the epigraph as defining him in the way it defines Mephistopheles. One possible reason for Bulgakov's choice of this quote is his love of *mistifikatsiia*, which is evidenced

It would be superfluous to try to refute such a claim. Instead, I propose simply that Woland at no point in the novel wills anyone any evil. At times he seems intent to achieve strictly good ends, as when he helps the Master and Margarita work out their fate in eternity, and at other times he seems to operate as a sort of agent or examiner. In this manner his presence and actions in Moscow are explained. He has come to "check up" on the citizens of Moscow, likely in view of the new social engineering of Soviet society, and in the process he presents them with the opportunity to show what they are really like. Many of them are punished as a result, however, there are no examples of anyone being lured into evil via an encounter with Woland and his suite. In some cases it is fair to say that there is no indication of any substantial change,'[10] and in a great deal of cases the person involved is either better or even much better as a result of this meeting.'[11] In some of these cases Woland has even carefully taken active and purposeful

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'[9](cont'd)throughout this novel, in particular. His choice for the epigraph is also in keeping with the suggestive techniques he employs frequently, i.e. it directs the reader to focus on the problems related to the epigraph's own context and relate them to the general problematic of the novel. Finally, as will be shown below, Goethe and Bulgakov seem to concur, on the metaphysical level, concerning the resolution of the general problem of good and evil, and the parameters of their agreement are indicated in this quotation. Thus the epigraph can be said to have a tonal (and perhaps philosophical) role rather than definitive or explicatory. This is again the case in The White Guard, where apocalyptic tonality is invoked in the epigraphs although the novel, in my reading, is anti-apocalyptical.

'[10] E.g. the masses at the Variety.

'[11] The epilog (pp. 800-812) traces the changes which many of these characters undergo.

steps to improve someone's situation.'[12] Where punishment is meted out without clearly indicated reasons we can only assume by analogy that there are good reasons and that such individuals are getting what they deserve.

Let us look at the case of Berlioz. Woland knows what the ultimate result of Berlioz' refusing to admit the existence of God or the devil will be, and although he does nothing to prevent the cruel death which he has predicted,'[13] he urges Berlioz to save his soul. Berlioz is on his way to report the lunatic foreigner to the authorities:

> Pozvonit'? Nu chto zhe, pozvonite, --pechal'no soglasil'sia bol'noi i vdrug strastno poprosil: -- No umoliaiu vas na proshchan'e, pover'te khot' v to, chto d'iavol sushchestvuet! O bol'shem ia uzh vas i ne proshu. Imeite v vidu, chto na èto sushchestvuet sed'moe dokazatel'stvo, i uzh samoe nadezhnoe! I vam ono seichas budet pred"iavleno.'[14]

There is absolutely no indication here that Woland desires or wills any evil, in fact, he shows rather superhuman tolerance towards Berlioz, and actually, he makes every effort to convince Berlioz to reconsider his position.

The affair at the Variety'[15] again shows him not as willing evil but as checking up on the citizens of Moscow. He neither lures nor seduces anyone into new depths of evil, rather he simply creates a situation in which he can bring to the surface that which is already present.'[16]

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'[12] E.g. the cases of Ivan, the Master and Margarita.
'[13] Note that he has predicted, but definitely not arranged the death. Compare p. 675.
'[14] Ibid., p. 461.
'[15] Ibid., pp. 533-547.
'[16] Ibid., "...a prosto mne khotelos' povidat' moskvichei v

Woland indicates that he is interested in whether or not the citizens of Moscow have changed, not so much outwardly,[197] which is obvious, but "... izmenilis' li èti gorozhane vnutrenne?"[198] His verdict is that they are "liudi kak liudi,"[199] greedy, but capable of compassion, much like their predecessors, except perhaps a little worse because of the housing shortage.[200]

It would be possible to go through the text this way and demonstrate analytically that truly at no point does Woland will any evil, however, a more productive path will be to gather together all of Woland's 'philosophical' expositions, and attempt to derive a meaning from them. We have already seen him discussing the existence of God, and its importance.[201] He has also expressed an opinion to the effect that men are all basically the same, i.e. that human nature is one. There are several other points he makes which round out both his philosophical position and his role in the novel. In one key passage he expounds on the nature of evil. He is talking to Matthew the Levite who has come with a message from Christ. Woland ask him

> Ne budesh li ty tak dobr podumat' nad voprosom: chto by delalo tvoe dobro, esli by ne sushchestvovalo zla, i kak by vygliadela zemlia, esli by s nee ischezli teni?[202]

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[196](cont'd)masse, a udobnee vsego èto bylo sdelat' v teatre." p. 624.
[197] Ibid., p. 536-537.
[198] Ibid., p. 538.
[199] Ibid., p. 541.
[200] Ibid., This seems to be consistent with Jeshua's assertion that there are no bad people. P. 444.
[201] See above.
[202] Ibid., p. 776.

He is accusing Matthew of unnecessary asceticism, and of lacking love for life and its fullness. Matthew has a very limited view of the nature of morality and of reality. According to Woland evil is not the opposite of good, but its complement; they are part of a whole. One is not possible without the other. A world without shadows, or a universe without evil is inconceivable, a 'fantasy'.[203] Elsewhere, he suggests that the proper way to approach life excludes asceticism and puritanism, i.e. a one-sided view of reality.

> "...Chto-to volia vasha, nedobroe taitsia v muzhchinakh, izbegaiushchikh vina, igr, obshchestva prelestnykh zhenshchin, zastol'noi besedy. Takie liudi ili tiazhko bol'ny, ili vtaine nenavidiat okruzhaiushchikh."[204]

These are things which, if we expand them to include all similar things in a general grouping, form an integral part of life, and, as such, are not to be rejected. Life or reality is one, a whole to be understood, accepted and lived in its entirety.

When Margarita expresses concern about justice in the case of Pontius Pilate, Woland smirks somewhat at her compassion, but assures her that "Vse budet pravil'no, na ètom postroen mir."[205] Even Pilate, who has presumably

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[203] Ibid., p. 776.
[204] Ibid., p. 624. This may invite an interesting comparison with Dostoevsky's loners.
[205] Ibid, p. 797. Generally, on the question of the role of evil, Bulgakov subtly but distinctly differs from Aquinas as he expresses himself in the Reply to Objection 1. "As Augustine says, *Since God is supremely good, he would not permit any evil at all in his works, unless he were sufficiently almighty and good to bring good even from evil.*" *Summa*, Question 2, Article 1. This suggests a rather interesting comparison with the epigraph from *Faust*.

committed the greatest sin of all, namely cowardice,[206] is forgiven and granted eternal life. This seems to imply that there is hope for all men, that human weakness is taken into consideration in the final judgement. Evil can be said to be only a passing transient manifestation of human imperfection. It exists, but its domain and effects are limited, and it does not have the characteristic of absolute negativity. If this is the case then good also cannot be absolute, in fact, they must together form two aspects or manifestations of moral reality, or freedom. Man has traditionally conceived of God as goodness, but Bulgakov seems by his rejection of a polar opposition between good and evil to reject this description in favor of one which centers on God as the source of eternal justice.[207] For Bulgakov justice seems to imply that there is no traditional hell; that men are not condemned for being men. Jeshua-Christ affirmed that all men are good , it is just their surroundings that make it difficult to choose correctly all the time.[208] The fundamental difference between good and evil is not what has been traditionally believed. Defending his role in the order of things, and referring to those things which belong to his domain and those which belong elsewhere, Woland says:

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[206] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 721, 745.
[207] Of course, one could say that in such a conception justice equals goodness, but this is not the crux of the matter. The important point is that the usual axes of heaven-hell or good-evil have been replaced by an operative concept of an ultimately just and positive order.
[208] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 444.

> "Kazhdoe vedomstvo dolzhno zanimat'sia svoimi delami. Ne sporiu, nashi vozmozhnosti dovol'no veliki, oni gorazdo bol'she, chem polagaiut nekotorye , ne ochen' zorkie, liudi..."[209]

In these other-worldly descriptions Bulgakov is clearly redefining or re-arranging the categories or notions of good and evil. We are unable to ascertain the difference between peace and light from the text, but it is abundantly clear that they are not in a relation of opposites.[210] Woland's domain, which includes the realm of peace, but also other modes of eternal life,[211] obviously is not limited to the domain of fire and brimstone we know from tradition as the dominion of the " dukh zla i povelitel' tenei."[212] Whether it be the crowd from his ball, his extremely likeable associates Behemoth, Koroviev, Azazello, and Hella, or the Master and Margarita, there is no indication that his subjects are suffering. Frida and Pilate appear as exceptions, but the fates of both of them are subsequently changed for the better. We also can assume that there is a series of stages which souls go through within this domain, or as they pass through and out of it, as Pilate did.[213]

Actually, any attempt to state categorically anything about the contours of Bulgakov's cosmos would be mere

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[209] Ibid, p. 699.
[210] Ibid, p. 776.
[211] Including the modes of Azazello and Abadona, of Koroviev and Behemoth, those of the guests at his ball, and later that of the Master and Margarita.
[212] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 775.
[213] Pilate, Frida, Behemoth, Koroviev, etc., all go through important changes. Note the general similarity here with the Dantean and Goethean schemes, in terms of several levels in the beyond.

speculation. We have located his great concern with problems of a religious nature and especially the problems of the existence of God, good and evil, and personal immortality. These questions are inextricably bound up with each other in the novel, just as they are in reality.

> An 'immortality' which could be demonstrated without any reference to God would be only an indefinite survival which might conceivably prove to be the fact in a world where there was no God at all; this is not the 'better life' that any religiously minded man, least of all a Christian, is particularly interested in."[214]

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[214] A.E. Taylor, "The Christian Hope of Immortality," (in) Philosophy of Religion, p. 503.

## IV. SYNTHESIS

There should be no doubt by this point that there is a significant religious dimension to Bulgakov's novels The White Guard and The Master and Margarita. He is frequently very much concerned with the meaning of the human situation and the relation between this life and the beyond. In these two novels we find no development of questions which seek to understand or interpret reality via an examination of political processes or ideologies, despite the vivid depiction of life and events in Kiev, Moscow and Jerusalem.

Most references to politics are to political institutions, and the general tone of these references is satirical. In fact, there is a very noticeable satirical bent vis a vis any and all institutions whether governmental or other. Writers' organizations, critics, the police, organized religion, the army, etc., - all become the objects of Bulgakov's satire. In contrast, there is no attempt made to satirize genuine religious feeling or metaphysical principles. That is not to say that these matters are not presented with a good deal of humor and laughter, which is fully consistent with Bulgakov's views, but it is these and similar questions and concerns which receive a positive and constructive treatment in the novels. Instead of parodying or satirizing them, he develops and expounds them.

There are several stylistic and conceptual means by which Bulgakov presents his views and these means in turn reflect his conceptualizing. I will discuss several of these

here as they pertain to The White Guard and The Master and Margarita. As indicated in Chapter I, dreams play a significant role in Bulgakov's fiction. In fact, two of the works discussed there, i.e. Adam and Eve and Flight are cast almost entirely as dreams. Such is not the case in The White Guard and The Master and Margarita, but there are a number of dreams in both, at least one of which plays a very prominent role in each. These dreams serve a purpose similar to that outlined in Chapter I. By intertwining dream with reality the author is able to suspend temporal[215] and spatial restrictions and concentrate on other problems in a way which would be otherwise very difficult if not impossible. In The White Guard, Aleksei has a dream, some details of which have been previously mentioned.[216] However, what we have been calling Aleksei's dream is only a small portion of a dream sequence which spans several chapters.[217]

To begin with, Aleksei has difficulty falling asleep, and begins reading Dostoevsky's *Besy*.[218] Finally, he falls asleep and is visited by "...malen'kogo rosta koshmar."[219] After trying to shoot at his dream,[220] he sleeps for a

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[215] Time itself is a matter worth studying in both of these novels. Here it interests us in relation to dreams and the figural technique, but, for example, in The White Guard it is treated on various levels. Beattie and Powell have begun a study of time in The Master and Margarita. ("Relativity," Canadian-American Slavic Studies XV 2-3, pp. 250-269). There is much more to be done here that would open up new dimensions of Bulgakov's work.

[216] Chapter I, p. 22, Chapter II, passim.

[217] Bulgakov, The White Guard pp. 52-73.

[218] Ibid., p. 52, and c.f. p. 65.

[219] Ibid., p. 52.

[220] Ibid., in a scene obviously reminiscent of Ivan Karamazov's encounter with his devil.

couple of hours "bez snovidenii"[221] until early morning when "Turbinu stal snit'sia Gorod."[222] But what follows cannot possibly be considered a dream. It is a detailed, complex and extended description of the city and contemporary events. The narrator is the same as the narrator of the entire novel and much of the narration is of events which could not have been accessible to Aleksei.[223] Again, after some twelve pages of this description one comes to the following passage in which reality is described in dream-like colours:

> Idut, idut mimo okrovavlennye teni, begut videniia, rastrepannye devich'e kosy, tiur'my, strel'ba, i moroz, i polnochnyi krest Vladimira...[224]

It is certainly not evident here what the dividing line is between dream and reality. The next sentence of the novel reads " Veshchii son gremit, katitsia k posteli Alekseia Turbina."[225] Is this another dream, or a dream within a dream, or was what came before not really a dream at all? Without a doubt, the author makes his depiction purposely ambivalent. Again, the above quotation is followed by several more pages of narrative which cannot possibly be a dream, for, among other things, it contains references to Aleksei as he sleeps,[226] and these references contain no shift in narrator. When the passage which in Chapter II

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[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., e.g. pp. 61-62.
[224] Ibid., p. 64.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

above was called Aleksei's dream[227] begins, there is no doubt that it is a dream. However, it blends almost imperceptibly with the flow of the preceding narrative passage, except that it is set in from the margin by about an inch.[228] Of course, the dream is about Paradise, and Bulgakov could hardly have discussed what he does in any "normal" narrative passage. In this way, he is able to remove all constrictions of space and time and raise questions relating to eternity. Within the dream past, present and future merge together into a kind of divine simultaneity.[229] In The Master and Margarita Bulgakov will develop a similar treatment of this question. The conclusion that begs to be made is that his vision cannot be expressed artistically or otherwise through description of reality as normally experienced. His vision of reality transcends

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[227] Ibid., i.e. pp. 68-73.

[228] Ibid., p. 68. There are several noteworthy points here. 1) Bulgakov uses a technique which is almost identical to that which he uses to move from the Moscow to the Jerusalem sections (pp. 435, 587-88, 714) and back (pp. 458-59, just once) in The Master and Margarita. He also uses it once in Theatrical Novel (p. 277). The technique consists in ending a chapter or passage with a phrase which is immediately repeated in the following passage or chapter, and in this way the shift in levels from reality to dream or Moscow to Jerusalem, etc., is much smoother and a close connection is established between them. 2) The narrator of the novel as a whole also narrates Alekséi's dream despite the indentation and shift in levels, etc. 3) A number of other passages (e.g. 65-66, 75) are also indented, but for no obvious reason which could suggest a consistent purpose. Likewise, other dreams are not indented, so there is no unity in the integration of dream sequences.

[229] Ibid.,E.g. p. 71. "V dvadsatom godu bol'shevikov-to, kogda brali Perekop, vidimo-nevidimo polozhili." Alexei has his dream, of course, in 1918. C.f. Auerbach, Mimesis pp. 156-58.

normal sensory experience. He again gives clear expression to this at the end of The White Guard,[230] once more within a dream context, and still once more these dreams are not clearly distinguished from reality.[231] These dreams almost seem to have a separate existence: "Sonnaia drema proshla nad gorodom,..."[232] Dreaming is not always associated with sleeping people,[233] and quite likely this separation of dreams from any ostensible dreamer indicates the need to show that certain things, i.e. the intuition of eternity, the spiritual interpretation of reality, the intangible, the ineffable are not unreal, i.e. not just a dream or a subjective fiction, but have an objective existence.

There are two long dreams in The Master and Margarita, and they occur spatially and temporally in close proximity to each other. The first, the dream of Nikanor Ivanovich,[234] is of little significance for present purposes. It is shown as a very ordinary dream, and it is doubtful that Bulgakov is implying any meaning beyond a simple, psychological relationship between dreams and the content of consciousness on the one hand,[235] and a satire on foreign currency laws, human greed and police methods on the other.

Ivan Bezdomnyi's dream[236] follows almost immediately after Nikanor's. Like Aleksei, Ivan finds sleep and his

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[230] Ibid., p. 270.
[231] Ibid., pp. 266-270.
[232] Ibid., p. 266.
[233] Ibid., E.g. pp. 266-270.
[234] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 576-87.
[235] Ibid., p. 578.
[236] Ibid., pp. 587-99.

dream only with the approach of dawn,[237] and here Bulgakov employs it as a bridge between the Moscow and Jerusalem sections of the novel.[238] That in itself would not have a great deal of significance, except that he dreams the events which follow immediately upon those narrated by Woland concerning Jeshua and Pilate,[239] and immediately preceding those taken from the Master's novel, as read by Margarita.[240] Clearly, the dream is not just a product of Ivan's imagination. Its function is to show that there is an objective truth which is accessible to all.[241] In this way it is a mistake to view the Moscow and Jerusalem sections as separated from each other. They are joined in several ways: first of all, by Woland who is an eyewitness to both series of events, secondly, by Ivan, who dreams part of the Jerusalem narrative, but in such a way that it cannot possibly be viewed as simply a product of his subconscious, and thirdly, by the Master, the artist whose creative vision of objective truth and reality transcends time and space to reach into eternity and the infinite, i.e. to arrive at the true meaning of God, life, etc.

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[237] Ibid., p.587.
[238] See note 227 above.
[239] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 435-58.
[240] Ibid., pp. 714-746.
[241] Despite my assertion that this represents an objective truth, the Jerusalem chapters are not entirely consistent with each other. C.f. R. Pope, "Ambiguity and Meaning in The Master and Margarita: The Role of Afranius," Slavic Review XXXVI #1, (March 1977), pp. 1-24. Pope does seem to go too far in his explanations of inconsistencies. Much more probable explanations can be adduced which harmonize more readily with the general tenor of the novel.

These are the bridges between the Moscow and Jerusalem sections of the novel, but the reader senses that there is much more that joins the two, while he is at odds to specify just what that is. It seems that this intangible something is what prevents readers from arriving at a complete synthetic understanding of the novel.[242] The first step is to recognize and accept the religious dimension. Once this step has been taken numerous possibilities emerge. One of the most significant of these is to see the novel as being largely constructed of "figures," which provide a basis for an analysis of the text and which explain the relationships between not only the Moscow and Jerusalem sections, but much more. According to E. Auerbach, through figures

> ...a connection is established between two events which are linked neither temporally nor causally - a connection which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension.[243]

Milne very plausibly proposes certain parallels between The Master and Margarita and medieval mystery and morality plays.[244] She goes on to discuss the novel in terms of figures and the figural technique, which is one of the key elements linking it to these Medieval traditions. She has done a commendable job of indicating the exceedingly complex internal and external interrelationships which hold between the various characters and passages of the novel understood

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[242] Ibid., p. 24, f.n. 47, gives a list, by now outdated but still representative, of critics who feel that the novel is somehow not complete, that something is missing which would otherwise allow the novel to cohere.

[243] Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 73. Also quoted in Milne, Comedy, p. 4.

[244] Milne, Comedy, pp. 2-4.

as figures.[245] Unfortunately, she seems overly hesitant to take the final step in her analysis. The above quotation from Auerbach is incomplete as it stands here - and in Milne's essay. Auerbach goes on in his discussion of the all important connection between figures to a crucial qualification of what has come before.

> ...It (i.e. the connection) can be established only if both occurences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding. The horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurences is dissolved; the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.[246]

Milne seems intentionally to avoid this question,[247] although she does not appear to be totally unaware of its significance.[248] Be that as it may, we can see why Bulgakov brought together Jerusalem and Moscow, Jeshua-Christ, Satan, and such a range of natural and supernatural characters in this novel. The final sequence of the novel, (excluding the Epilog), provides the explanation for all the rest, for the

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[245] Ibid., pp. 5ff.E.g. Azazello is linked at various levels to the Master, Pilate and Jeshua. The Master is also linked to Woland, Ivan, Margarita, Pilate and Jeshua. "The figures in the Kaleidoscope of The Master and Margarita move into a pattern of intricate and awesome complexity." p. 32.

[246] Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 74. (Emphasis is mine.)

[247] She does vaguely breach it, esp. Comedy, p. 5, with a quotation from another article by Auerbach, but the quotation and her employment of it are anything but definitive.

[248] Following the quotation mentioned in the preceding note, she speaks of "an end-of-time apotheosis," but again draws no conclusions whatsoever, nor does she even hint at any possible ramifications. Ibid.

seeming chaos which dominates, and an intimation of what Auerbach calls fulfillment,[249] i.e. the realization of what is "figured" on the earthly level. One can also introduce here, as does Petro[250] the notion of Moscow as the New Jerusalem, the Soviet appropriation of the traditional notion of Moscow as the "Third Rome", which not only extends the figural connection between Moscow and Jerusalem, but also heightens the reader's sensitivity to the eschatological questions raised by the novel.

The role of *figura* in The White Guard is considerably smaller than in The Master and Margarita. I have discussed something of it above, especially in relation to the Apocalypse. However, it is not necessary that the figural technique be employed as extensively in The White Guard as it is in The Master and Margarita. I want only to suggest that the notion of a vertical causal relationship, the structural[251] and virtual[252] presence of which I have demonstrated in The Master and Margarita, is also present in The White Guard. In other words, as I have suggested all along, Bulgakov views the world as part of an ordered cosmos, with God (Divine Providence ) as its ruling principle, and the ultimate source of its meaning.[253] Auerbach writes of

> ...an exegetic context which often removed the thing

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[249] Auerbach, Mimesis e.g. pp. 75, 197.
[250] Satire>, pp. 56-57.
[251] I.e. as represented by the various figures.
[252] E.g. Woland's discussion with Berlioz and Bezdomnyi, and p. 797: "Vse budet pravil'no, na ètom postroen mir."
[253] Esp. Bulgakov, *Belaia Gvardiia*, pp. 14, 270.

> told very far from its sensory base, in that the reader or listener was forced to turn his attention from the sensory occurence and toward its meaning.[254]

I will permit myself one more quotation from Auerbach, because, whether in conjunction with the concept of *figura* or figural technique where it occurs, or even considered outside of that context, it gives strong support for the present contention regarding the need to investigate the religious dimension in Bulgakov and the crucial function of the notion of a vertical causal relationship.[255] I have in mind the

> ...antagonism between sensory appearance and meaning, an antagonism which permeates the early, and indeed the whole, Christian view of reality.[256]

The demonstration and analysis of a figural technique goes a long way towards explaining the presence and employment of religious themes, motifs and ideas in Bulgakov's novels, but a number of questions remain unanswered. Perhaps one of the most pressing of these concerns the motivation for the great variance between Bulgakov's account of the events of Easter in The Master and Margarita and the biblical account, and again between his presentation of the Apocalypse in The White Guard and the biblical tradition. It has been suggested elsewhere[257] that

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[254] Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 48, and on p. 49 he speaks of a "...context of meanings."
[255] Note that the notion of such a vertical causal relationship also lies at the base of the Thomistic metaphysical-cosmological system.
[256] Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 49.
[257] E.g. Milne, Comedy, p. 2, Wright, "World View," pp. 260ff.

Bulgakov demythologizes the traditional account, and I can see no reason to disagree. In fact, there are very strong textual bases for such a contention.[258]

"Skazal tak, chtoby bylo poniatnee."[259] In this way Jeshua explains the choice of words and images he made to express himself on the subject of eschatology and truth. The truth is not in the words themselves, but in their interpreted meaning. Truth seems to be Jeshua's chief concern. He wishes to assert its existence and to make it understandable.[260]

It would seem that Bulgakov also intended to make a truth more understandable. He wanted to make Christ's message more palatable to materialistic Soviet readers, while maintaining essential elements of Christianity.[261] Rudolf Bultmann thinks that the realities of contemporary civilization require a demythologized understanding of religion.[262] According to Bultmann, the mythological aspects of the New Testament are unacceptable to modern man. If the New Testament embodies a truth independent of its "mythical setting," then this truth must be stripped of its "mythical

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[258] The text itself of the Jerusalem sections in *Master i Margarita* is evidence of this, together with the passages in which Woland refers to the events of those sections, and the "transcendant" passages at the end of the novel. Note that demythologize does not mean de-spiritualize. In other words, Bulgakov's approach is not to be equated with Renan's because Bulgakov does not deny Christ's Godhood, and in fact affirms it in the just-mentioned "transcendant" passages.

[259] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 441.

[260] Ibid., e.g. pp. 439, 441, 446, etc.

[261] Compare e.g. Milne, Comedy, pp. 3, 8, Wright, Life and Interpretations, pp. 262-263.

[262] R. Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," (in) Philosophy of Religion, pp. 345-347.

framework," - demythologized.[263] "There is nothing specifically Christian in the mythical view of the world as such."[264] For Bulgakov, the essence of Christianity centres on Christ's love for man, on his proclamation of man's essential goodness and his relation to God.[265] He interprets Christianity in this key and by his "demythologizing" and "remythologizing," attempts to show the eternal and absolute character of the truths of God's existence and man's basic goodness. In relation to the Jerusalem chapters one finds repeatedly stressed the need for a critical approach to the Bible. For example, Woland stresses the historical innaccuracy of the Gospels,[266] Jeshua says that Matthew keeps writing things down at variance with the way they actually happened,[267] and, perhaps most important of all, Bulgakov retells the story himself, liberally borrowing from various historical sources, and inventing what suits his artistic purposes, all the while striving to retain what seems to him to be the crucial elements of the meaning of Christianity.[268]

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[263] Bultmann, "New Testament," p. 345. "But our motive in so doing must not be to make the New Testament relevant to the modern world at all costs. The question is simply whether the New Testament message consists exclusively of mythology, or whether it actually demands the elimination of myth if it is to be understood as it is meant to be." P. 350.

[264] Ibid., p. 345.

[265] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, esp. p. 444. C.f. also Wright, Life and Interpretations, p. 263, and Wright, "World View," p. 161.

[266] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 459.

[267] Ibid., pp. 439, 443.

[268] The question of what exactly was borrowed from which historical and/or archeological sources and what was invented, I leave to others more qualified than myself, especially as it seems that these questions cannot

Another element which seems to me strikingly interesting in Bulgakov's approach to the question of myth in man's understanding of his world, is that not only does he demythologize the biblical account, but he also provides a "remythologized" account of events in the Moscow sections of The Master and Margarita.

> Myth is an expression of man's conviction that the origin and purpose of the world in which he lives are to be sought not within it but beyond it -- that is, beyond the realm of known and tangible reality -- and that this realm is perpetually dominated and menaced by those mysterious powers which are its source and limit. Myth is also an expression of man's awareness that he is not lord of his own being. It expresses his sense of dependence not only within the visible world, but more especially on those forces which hold sway beyond the confines of the known. Finally, myth expresses man's belief that in this state of dependence he can be delivered from the forces within the visible world.[2'']

The whole notion of myth is a very complex one and perhaps most difficult to analyze when it is closest to the point of creation. Nevertheless, just as the mythological account of the Gospels is unpalatable to modern man, it would be equally difficult to speak of man's essential goodness and a positive ordering of the cosmos by a just God via a simple straightforward description of the Moscow of Bulgakov and Stalin in the 20's and 30's. Enter Woland, Behemoth, Koroviev, Azazello and Hella, and Bulgakov is able to mould events, characters and concepts as he will to fit his

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[2'']cont'd)ultimately determine an adequate interpretation of the text. Compare e.g. Elbaum, *Analiz*.

[2''] Ibid., p. 351. Eliade, Mephistopheles, pp. 82-87, suggests that myths often have their origin in heresy, i.e. in conscious and learned attempts to deal with a given problem outside of or in opposition to an appropriate dogma or tradition.

proposed interpretation of reality.

The tendency to demythologize is not as prevalent in The White Guard, but, especially in his interpretation of the Apocalypse, Bulgakov shows that this approach began to develop in him very early. He has rethought the Apocalypse and stripped it bare of its mythological trappings, so that only an intuition of eternity and the end of time remains. The notion of cataclysms, of the beast, the anti-Christ, and many of the events foretold by St. John are downplayed or even scoffed at. Of course, the position being represented is still deist, and nowhere does Bulgakov attempt to change or abolish the essential meaning of Christianity, but he is always questioning it - critically and hermeneutically.[270] His focus in both novels is constantly eschatological. His sense of history, or of man as a human being in history, is subordinated to his sense of man as an immortal being, as a creature of God. He tends to treat historical events and periods equivocally in terms of their meaning, while concentrating on man in relation to eternity.[271] As I have repeatedly stressed, Bulgakov leads both of his novels to a conclusion consistent with what Milne calls in reference to The Master and Margarita "an end-of-time apotheosis,"[272] and in this eschatological context the reader finds an

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[270] Compare Bultmann, p. 352: "...Whereas the older liberals used criticism to eliminate the mythology of the New Testament, our task to-day is to use criticism to interpret it...But the criterion adopted must be taken not from modern thought, but from the understanding of human existence which the New Testament enshrines."

[271] Compare Bultmann, "New Testament," p. 357.

[272] Milne, Comedy, p. 5.

expression of fulfillment of Bulgakov's notion of cosmic justice: a positive resolution of all situations and problems.[273]

In addition there is also a strong indication of a conception of good and evil which is, as far as can be determined, at odds with the dualistic conception which dominates most opinions. When reading Bulgakov one becomes acutely aware that something is not the way we would expect it to be, that, for example, the devil is somehow not as evil and sinister as one might anticipate, that somehow Bolsheviks and "broads" ought not to be in Paradise with God-fearing, Christian soldiers, that Pilate should suffer more than a bad conscience for what he has done. Woland, however, makes it clear that things are not as straightforward as the dogmatic Matthew would have them, that light and dark, good and evil, go together as parts or aspects of a whole.[274] Although there is no argument on the ratiocinative level, the whole of The Master and Margarita is in agreement with Woland. Likewise, in The White Guard God scatters all ordinary categories and expectations to the wind when he diminishes the importance of whether or not an individual believes in Him, or when He purportedly says priests give him more trouble than anyone else.[275] Similarly, in the famous final passage of The White Guard

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[273] Esp. Bulgakov, *Belaia Gvardiia*, p. 14, and *Master i Margarita*, p. 797. Also c.f. Wright, "World View," esp. p. 153.
[274] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, p. 776.
[275] Bulgakov, *Belaia Gvardiia*, p. 72.

all purely human concerns, especially manifestations of human and natural evil, are shown to be of passing import in relation to eternity and man's intuition of it. Surely, Bulgakov in this aspect of his writings is attempting to overcome the obvious limitations of traditional dualist conceptions, and is proposing, or at the very least, moving in the direction of, the *coincidentia oppositorum* or the mystery of the totality.[276]

I have indicated above that Bulgakov had a great interest in Goethe, especially his *Faust*. It may well be that there is as great a literary and intellectual debt as there was interest. Although the relation between the two has received some attention, there has been too little examination of the general relationship which holds between their metaphysical views. M. Eliade outlines briefly but tersely the presence in Goethe's *Faust* of a "sympathetic" relationship between God and Mephistopheles, and explains the paradoxical nature of that relationship in terms of Goethe's notion of the cosmos as the "All-one".[277] He mentions Giordano Bruno, Boehme and Swedenborg as "sources of this metaphysic of immanence,"[278] and goes on by way of introduction to his main subject, i.e. the pre-history of this concept, to discuss briefly the mystery of the totality in relation to its role in the thought of Balzac, Nicholas of Cusa, the Pseudo-Areopagite, Jung and Heraclitus.[279]

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[276] Eliade, Mephistopheles, esp. pp. 78-124.
[277] Ibid., pp. 78-80, 88.
[278] Ibid., p. 80.
[279] Ibid., p. 80-81.

Interestingly, "...for Nicholas of Cusa the *coincidentia oppositorum* was the least imperfect definition of God",[200] while Heraclitus, in typically enigmatic style, expressed himself as follows: "God is day and night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger - all the opposites, this is the meaning."[201] He also traces the concept through various cultures and historical periods, including Indian metaphysics and myths, German romanticism, classical Greece, the Middle Ages, etc.[202] In all cases, the concept is essentially metaphysical, and it expresses itself in terms of the problems of good and evil and eschatology. If I understand his position correctly, Bulgakov maintains this pattern.

The other standard alternative answer to this problem, and the one most of those who care to contemplate good and evil on the level of metaphysics are likely to choose, involves one or another form of dualism. In other words, there are two forces in the cosmos - one positive and one negative, and they are in conflict with each other. This may be God and the devil, spirit and matter or any configuration of cosmic forces which establish the same general dichotomy. The fact that the specific features of the conception are flexible is important insofar as this is also the case with the *coincidentia oppositorum* .[203]

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[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., p. 81, f.n.
[202] Ibid., pp. 82ff.
[203] The discussion in the remainder of this section is taken from Eliade, Mephistopheles, pp. 78-124. My summary is highly schematic, but for such general purposes should be

(1) In some cases it explains evil as a consequence of God's desire to achieve good in all things without abolishing the notion of freedom. Evil is thereby a part of the overall good. Goethe provides an example of this tendency insofar as his Mephistopheles does aspire to certain clearly defined evil ends, yet ultimately achieves good ones, and for this reason God permits him to go about his business. At the same time there is a kind of sympathetic character to their relationship which Eliade clearly identifies in the "Prologue in Heaven," and a sort of interdependence. Eliade identifies a whole host of traditions in which there is such a consanguinity or a definite interdependence between God and Satan. However, they are rarely equals, but rather unequal partners with God being the stronger, yet not totally omnipotent partner. (2) There is yet another tradition wherein a transvaluation of values occurs, and the values normally attached to good and evil simply are overturned or abolished. (3) A third tendency focuses on the actual unity of the opposites. All of these conceptions imply a certain type of paradoxical-mystical thinking and require a shifting of metaphysical levels.

I have no intention of trying to apply specific categories to what I perceive to be Bulgakov's application of the notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. I will simply indicate several points that I believe give contour to his notion, but it must be stressed that by its very nature it

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[3] (cont'd) acceptable.

cannot be captured entirely.[284] First of all, though Bulgakov's devil is, by his own admission, tied to and part of the forces of darkness,[285] he is just as obviously not an agent, nor a practitioner, of evil as we normally understand it.[286] (Immediately, this separates him from Mephistopheles.) Darkness is integrally related to light through real things, and is not a separate entity or modality. Bulgakov leaves us with the impression that evil as such, although as a name it signifies something, does not signify anything absolute. We are led to believe that cowardice is the greatest sin, yet the real nature of Pilate's sin remains[287] ambiguous, and his punishment (psychological torment) might appear inadequate if we consider his "sin," its relation to eternity and to his ultimate reward, which is light. Woland works with God, the ruler of the domain of light,[288] who in actual fact is unnamed. Although clearly subordinated to Him,[289] Woland does have his own department, and he runs it.[290] He seems to

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[284] Because The White Guard is less developed and prior to The Master and Margarita but still closely related, I will refer to the latter exclusively in this section in order to provide a better focus for the analysis.
[285] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 624, 776.
[286] See Chapter III above.
[287] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 721, 735, 745.
[288] Ibid., esp. pp. 776-777.
[289] In the first three chapters Woland establishes that there is a force in the universe which is in control, and it is clear that this is other than him. We see him on several occasions, e.g. Berlioz' death, the fate of the barman Fokich, his ball, etc., able to predict events or to be in apparent control, but not able to alter what has been decreed by some other power, obviously, God.
[290] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, pp. 699, 776-777.

be loosely bound by certain precepts and traditions,[291] but it is not clear why. He identifies a close relationship between God and himself without at all defining it.[292] We are left with a certain feeling of ambivalence and paradox, yet we can detect the direction in which Bulgakov's thought is heading, and clearly, it is related to the *coincidentia oppositorum* .

> In general, one can say that all these myths, rites and beliefs (i.e. those in which the *coincidentia oppositorum* can be found) have the aim of reminding men that the ultime reality, the sacred, the divine, defy all possibilities of rational comprehension; that the *Grund* can only be grasped as a mystery or a paradox, that the divine conception cannot be conceived as a sum of qualities and virtues but as an absolute freedom, beyond good and evil; that the divine, absolute and transcendent are qualitatively different from the human, relative and immediate because they do not constitute particular modalities of being or contingent situations. In a word, these myths, rites and theories involving the *coincidentia oppositorum* teach men that the best way of apprehending God or the ultimate reality is to cease, if only for a few seconds, considering and imagining divinity in terms of immediate experience; such an experience could only perceive fragments and tensions.[293]

It may be difficult to justify interpretation of a work of art, in this case literary, in terms of philosophical problems and analysis. Many would say that aesthetic concerns are more relevant. Again, others would say that such an interpretation is irrelevant, that the most significant matters focus on the realistic description of society and the sociological and political issues which

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[291] See note 298 above.
[292] Bulgakov, *Master i Margarita*, e.g. p. 461.
[293] Eliade, Mephistopheles,p. 82.

emerge. While I cannot take issue in detail with these and other such criticisms which come easily to mind, I hope I have made it clear that philosophical problems of a religious nature play a large role in Bulgakov's two major novels. Philosophy and literature have been combined in various proportions by both philosophers and littérateurs for many hundreds of years,[2'4] and Bulgakov seems to have taken up a place in that great and broad tradition.[2'5] It should always be a prime methodological consideration to identify the problem which a given writer or thinker is trying to resolve or understand in order to understand a given work.[2'6] I trust that the present study has established the presence of religious motifs and themes in Bulgakov's work, especially in the two major novels, and indicated their function therein, including the place of such elements as eschatology and the Apocalypse, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, figural technique and dreams. I hope as well to have argued successfully that The Master and Margarita and The White Guard do not "cohere" unless one explores their religious-metaphysical dimensions.

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[2'4] To mention only a few of the most apparent examples, Plato, Dante, Goethe, Sartre, Heidegger and Hesse.

[2'5] C.f. Milne, Comedy, p. 40, f.n. 39, where she points out that Bulgakov's wife on at least one occasion referred to the work while in progress as a "philosophical novel," and suggests that she was expressing her husband's opinion.

[2'6] C.f. K. Popper, Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), esp. pp. 67ff., and 159.

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